a new river

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a new river

by hornysurmaine

Summary

Will had spent the last two years as a boat mechanic after working with Jack, and he may not be happy, but he was safe. So when Jack pressured him into helping to catch the Shrike and it ended with Will killing Hobbs, it was time to draw a line. No more FBI. Ever.

Except Hannibal Lecter had made his own decision: Hannibal, Will and Abigail were tied together by this experience and would continue to be a part of one another's lives. So now Will had the worst of all worlds: rapidly destabilising mental health, a psychiatrist taking care of him, and constant reminders of the job that he had attempted to leave.

(Hannibal if Will quit after S1E1 but couldn't quite escape the FBI.)

Notes

hi i can never shut the fuck up so: for context, this is canon divergent. this first chapter sticks p closely to s1e1 but it diverges a lot more soon. i currently have drafts up to chapter 6 but they need editing + i dont wanna post them all at once then leave u hanging for ages. the title is inspired by a song of the same name by the oh hellos, all of their music is hannibal vibes imo.

Chapter 1

Summer was coming to a close. It was no longer fully light when Will woke up to start work on the boats. It felt quieter, calmer when he was up to see the sunrise. When he walked between the main house and the workshop, the dogs ran into the garden and began splashing around on the seashore. He trusted them to be safe. They were strong swimmers and they knew their limits. And it wasn't like many people tended to be around his house, apart from on the odd hot day when people wanted a less populated stretch of beach to explore.

Will didn't expect to see anyone that day. It was a Saturday, and whenever possible he would only let clients pick up their boats on a weekday. He still worked weekends often, but it was a break from customer service. No matter how good of a mechanic he was, his customer service left him lacking, which he both knew and did not particularly care about. People from town would continue to come to Will to fix their boats, because his prices were fair, he never tried to scam anyone into unnecessary repairs or upgrades, and he got on with his work. If he was abrupt and not exactly a big talker, they would put up with it. They knew what to expect from him and it was worth it.

He was out working on a boat when the car pulled up outside his house. It looked too nice for Will to believe it was a customer. Some of Will's regulars trusted him to fix their trucks and motorbikes, although it wasn't technically a service he offered, but no one in a car like that would be willing to entrust it to a boat mechanic.

The dogs began barking. Will looked over as the driver-side door opened, but he did not approach. With any luck, it would be someone looking for directions and they would leave him alone soon enough.

But no. Of course it wouldn't be that simple.

Jack Crawford straightened up beside the car and made a beeline to Will, walking along with his hands in his jacket pockets and his eyes on Will.

Jack. Will picked up his rag and made a cursory attempt to remove the grease from his hands. He knew better than to show too much interest in what Jack might be about to say to him.

"Will!" Jack called, giving a polite but serious smile. "Good to see you again."

"Is it, Jack?" Will muttered.

It had been over two years since Will had seen Jack in person. Last time they saw each other, Will had been telling Jack that he quit, much to the protest of his boss. No more FBI special agent shit, no more lecturing at the Academy, nothing. Being a cop hadn't worked out because he didn't want to pull the trigger, so when his work with Jack had led to him having to fire his gun, he decided it was time to step away. He was losing himself to the people he was profiling and Jack wasn't trying very hard to help find Will again.

“It’s been a while, huh?” Jack said, coming to a stop in front of Will. He appraised Will, taking in the changes. Will was no body builder, but he knew he looked healthier. Working with his hands every day meant he required a certain level of physical strength, and there wasn’t much definition to his muscle, but he looked broader. He must be more tan, too, having replaced his days droning on in dark rooms with days standing in the summer sun, working on his boats. “You look good, Will. You look like you’re doing well.”

Will kept his expression firm. “I am doing well,” he agreed, although that would depend on how they were defining ‘well’. At the very least, he was fine. Stable. “Getting away from the FBI was good for me.” That was undeniably true.

Jack assessed their surroundings: Will’s dogs lying around the yard, the more curious among them coming to sniff at Jack; the few boats he was currently working on, stowed in his huge barn of a workshop; the sea, grey and uninviting, close enough that the sound of waves intruded upon their conversation.

“Don’t you miss it, Will? You were saving lives. Don’t you get bored of working on boats every day? You could be doing more. You and I both know you’re destined for bigger things.”

Will huffed out a bitter laugh. “You’re begging me.”

“Yeah, I am. Eight girls missing, Will, and I don’t know anyone else who can do the things you do. Please. You’re right, I’m begging you to help me save these girls. We’ll do it differently. You’ll only have to profile and interview. No showing up to the scenes, nothing that’ll put you at risk. We do it how you want to do it.”

One of the dogs nuzzled against Will’s hand. He absently petted it. “It’ll be different,” he echoed.

Jack put a steady hand on Will’s shoulder. “It’ll be your way. But you will do it, won’t you?”

Eight girls.

“Fuck, Jack…”

Jack’s eyes lit up like they did whenever something was going his way. He knew he had gotten Will to budge.

“We’re doing it my way.”

Jack squeezed his shoulder and broke out into a smile. “It’s good to have you back, Will.”

Will went to the crime scene in person. Jack had made it clear that he didn’t have to, but pictures weren’t the same. He needed to be there, in the room, able to see everything clearly.

Photographs were a form of art, so they always held a certain degree of subjectivity. Bodies, they could be art too. The signature got blurred when it was put through the filter of a crime scene photographer.

“Will?”

Will opened his eyes, blinking back to reality like a sleepwalker being awoken.

“Shit, Jack didn’t say you would be here. What the fuck, man?”

Beverly Katz stood beside Will in the victim’s bedroom. Her mouth was slightly open and she was grinning.

He forced a smile. They had worked together on a few cases last time Will had worked with Jack. She had always been the best - at her job, at dealing with Will, everything. Will had thought about her fondly since he quit, but never reached out. “Jack probably wasn’t sure that he would manage to convince me.”

“No shit. I didn’t think I’d see you here again,” she murmured, nodding appreciatively as she took in his appearance. Neither of them had changed that much, really. She had grown her hair out a bit and she didn’t have winged eyeliner on like she used to do. Her face might have matured slightly, but she still looked fresh. God knows how this job hadn’t sapped the life out of her. That was another thing she was good at. Making sure that this was her job, not her life.

“I didn’t expect to be here. It’s good to see you though, Beverly,” he said, then glanced at the body lying on the bed. She tracked his glance.

“Sorry, sorry, I’ll get out. You need an empty room. I was coming to look at the wounds - I found antler velvet in them,” she told him. “I’ll see you soon though, yeah?”

He tightened his lips into a smile for a split second and nodded. “Yeah.” She smiled at him and left him to return to his work.

The golden pendulum swung in front of his eyelids.

Will stood like a rod, a couple feet behind where Beverly stooped over the corpse on the metal table. Katz spoke casually, so Will could imagine she was in a breakroom, chatting with her colleagues over coffee. She was in her element here, searching for clues to find justice for these victims. Will might do a good job of acting the chameleon and assuming the skin of these killers to help Jack track them down, but that wasn’t Will. That was the killers, and there was no place for Will in this room. The two men shared raised eyebrows and furtive glances that spoke volumes. Will didn’t understand their private language well enough to determine what they were saying to one another, but they certainly objected to his presence.

He was a random ex-cop, with no real reason to be there. He was in the way, but they tolerated him because Jack was the one who put him there.

Beverly chatted with him like he was a regular part of the team, which Will appreciated, though her attempts didn't seem to sway the men.

The men left the room before Beverly or Will. He was left alone with her to share a moment of silent consideration before Elise's corpse. Beverly turned away first, landing her gaze on Will instead. She didn't disturb him immediately, but she spoke up after it became clear that Will would not break the silence any time soon.

"What do you say we grab a drink together?"

Will felt his brow furrow. He didn't look at her face, but he raised his eyes to her shoulder.

He didn't manage to formulate a response before Beverly snorted and gave him a light punch on the arm. "Hey, trust me, this isn't me asking you out on a date. Men aren't my thing, I'm just looking to get a couple beers with a friend, okay?"

Will cracked a smile. He wasn't someone who spent much time in the company of others, but Beverly was a fundamentally good person. Witty, empathetic, smart. She had been fun to work beside, and she was one of the only people he had missed from the FBI. He had only kept in contact with Alana, but that was because Alana was the most determined to make sure Will didn't drop off the grid. He was difficult to lock down. He could only be reached over phone or in person and he wasn't a fan of responding to texts.

"I think I can manage a couple of beers," he conceded, met with a beam from Beverly. He knew that part of why she asked him was because of the last time they had worked together. Last time, he wandered too close to the killers and there had been no one there to pull him back. This time, Beverly wouldn't let him deal with it alone.

Hannibal strikes Will as dull. Intelligent, perceptive - sure, but he was boring. A psychiatrist. He didn't seem able to turn it off. Or maybe Jack was telling him to turn it on.

"Look, I said I didn't want to put you out there alone again, and Doctor Lecter is part of that. We're doing things differently. If you're out there, we need to know that this isn't affecting your mental health outside of the job," Jack told him, firmly but with the tone of someone who knew they were about to start an argument.

"Don't psychoanalyse me. You said we were doing this my way, psychiatrists are *not* part of my way." He grabbed his jacket and headed for the door.

"We're doing it differently, Will, there have to be-"

The door swung closed behind Will and muted the rest of Jack's speech.

Of course he didn't want to be heading out into the field unsupported, but there had been no discussion of a psychiatrist, and like hell he wanted another psychiatrist shaking his head around like a baby rattle.

But both Jack and Doctor Lecter were insistent. Doctor Lecter was part of the deal, so Will would put up with him for this one case. The doctor visited him in his motel room, despite Will's unsubtle attempts to dissuade him from entering. Lecter was a good cook, he could admit, so at least this psychiatrist came with some perks. He doubted that Lecter would interest him, although he had been promised this by the doctor.

They drove to a construction site together to try to track down the Shrike, as he had now been named. Doctor Lecter made polite conversation on the drive, filled with unsubtle prods into his psyche.

"You used to be an officer." It was a statement, but Doctor Lecter clearly wanted an elaboration.

Will sighed but reluctantly obliged. "I wasn't a fan of pulling the trigger. I became a lecturer at the Academy, for a while, then Jack pulled me in on a case. I worked with him for about a year, but I got pulled too deep into it. We were looking for the Chesapeake Ripper and I felt like he was infecting my mind. I didn't feel like me."

Will curled his lips into the shape of a smile, but he knew his eyes betrayed his hurt. It had fucked with his mental health. It took him a good year to feel sure of who he was again, and that year had been filled with a slow realisation of betrayal. He had trusted Jack to take care of him and Jack hadn't done that. Sure, Jack felt bad about it, but he had known the job was breaking Will and he had let it happen anyway.

"Well. I never got to solve the Ripper case, I started having severe panic attacks on scene and they were forced to listen when I said I needed to step out. I stopped lecturing, too. I couldn't escape the Ripper when I was still climbing into his head every day. I fix boats now." He fixed his eyes on Hannibal's eyebrow for a second. "Does that help with your profile of me, Doctor Lecter?"

"Not everything I do is about psychoanalysing you, Will," Lecter said mildly.

"Sure," Will mumbled as they pulled up to the location.

Hannibal was in the way, more than anything. He tipped some papers onto the ground and poked at Will with questions as he tried to find leads, but Will managed to find something, nonetheless. Garret Jacob Hobbs.

They got his address and drove out to him for an interview. It should have been an interview.

They pulled up to a woman bleeding out on the doorstep and Will sprinted to try to save her. He knew it was already too late, but he had to tear himself away from her, pulling out his gun with his blood-soaked hands. He was shaking. He fired a shot when Garret Jacob Hobbs drew the knife across his daughter's neck. He fired a few more when Hobbs made a move to finish off his daughter, and once he had begun shooting, it was difficult to stop shooting holes

through Hobbs. He lowered his gun as he realised Hobbs was on the ground and his daughter was alive and coating the floor with her blood. He fumbled at her throat, desperate to help but feeling wholly out of his depth. Doctor Lecter took over soon enough and he watched in horror: the girl who may die in Doctor Lecter's hands, the cannibal who smiled at Will and mouthed a secret to him.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

> this is a p short chapter and im getting thru writing + editing this faster than i expected so i might go wild and update again this evening if i have time

Will stared at Abigail as she lay in the hospital bed, intubated and clinging onto life. Doctor Lecter had saved her. Will had saved her. Will had killed her father.

Doctor Lecter slumped in a chair beside Abigail's bed, his hand laid over hers in silent comfort. He was asleep and Will thought he might have never left her side. He was in the ambulance with her, wasn't he?

Will made the decision as he settled into a chair by the window, refusing to glance down at his hands in case there was a stain of blood left.

Will knew he looked rough. He couldn't sleep. His mind woke him up with images of Abigail, Hobbs, Elise, Cassie, the victims he had seen the last time he worked with Jack. His sheets had been soaked through and no amount of showering could wash away the traces of that night.

Now, he was once again standing across from Jack's desk. "I'm done, Jack," Will said.

Jack blinked up at him in cartoonish bewilderment. "Like that? You're just out?"

"Like that?" Will laughed and shook his head. "Jack, you said this time would be different. I wouldn't get too close. I left a woman to die and I shot a man to death. Your therapist didn't do shit apart from piss me off. You found your killer, there's no way he's going to kill any more girls. They're safe, like you wanted. I can't do this again. Find someone else."

Jack leaned forward onto the palms of his hands and pushed himself to his feet. "There *is* no one else, Will. No one else can do what you can. Listen, talk to Doctor Lecter, learn how to look without letting it get inside of you, then come back to me and help me save people. I need you, Will."

Will ran a hand through his hair and turned his gaze sharply onto a spot on the floor. “Why can no one else do what I do, Jack?” he spat. “I can’t die for this.”

He hadn’t said anything, not really, but they both knew exactly what was being implied. After Will left, Jack had needed fresh eyes to catch the Ripper. Miriam’s eyes had been too fresh. She was just a trainee. Will read about it in the papers and saw himself in every picture of her. He had been right to leave, and he was a fool to believe it would ever be different. His jaw clenched, but he couldn’t leave Jack like this.

“Jack, all I do is look at the evidence. You don’t need me. I agreed to come in on this one case, and we solved it.I can’t do this for you, not again. Why not just ask Doctor Lecter, you seem awfully fond of him,” he said, equal parts placating and bitter.

“I suppose I’ll have to ask Doctor Lecter.” Jack was still glaring at Will like a child who wasn’t being given his way, but Will wouldn’t back down in the face of his petty behaviour.

Will left the Academy for what he hoped would be the last time.

Will could let go of Jack, but he couldn’t let go of Abigail. He kept visiting her at the hospital, even if she wasn’t conscious. Often, Hannibal was there too.

Hannibal still failed to interest Will, but he didn’t displease Will. Whenever Will bumped into him, he always seemed to have enough homemade food to stretch between himself, Will, and Abigail. He was a psychiatrist, which counted as a mark against him, especially given his attempts to analyse Will, but he had eased off since Will had quit.

He dealt with Hannibal because he had to. As soon as they had pulled up to her house, all three had become bonded with one another. They had stared at death together. Will and Hobbs had taken Abigail’s family away, and it was only thanks to Hannibal that Abigail had survived. Will was not usually paternal, but he supposed that both he and Hannibal felt an obligation to try to give back what they had seen taken away from her.

Will was almost surprised to genuinely like Abigail. He didn’t have much interaction with anyone younger than himself (or anyone, period, if he was being honest). She wasn’t what he expected from a teenager. She was sharp and calculated and suffering through something that Will couldn’t help but understand. She was practical and rarely minced words. What had started as a guilt-motivated obligation became something he enjoyed.

“I’m just sick of being here,” she told Will on one occasion. She was picking at her nails, but she kept stopping to adjust her hair to cover the bandages on her neck. “I’m sick of everyone

looking at me and seeing my dad. I want them to stop staring at me. I want to live a normal life again."

Will nodded. Emotional talks weren't something he was usually good at, but Abigail understood his language. "Did you ever fish with your dad? Or just hunt."

She paused. A second passed without her taking a breath, then she said, "We just hunted together."

"I fish. It's calmer than hunting. You can just stand in the river and wait for a bite. No one around. No one watching. No nurses or support groups. Just time with your thoughts."

Abigail gave a soft nod. "It sounds nice."

"I can teach you how to fish, you know. When the hospital give you the all clear to go on days out, I can take you out of here for a day and we can get away from it."

She gave a weak smile. "I'd really like that."

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will sat across from Alana at Hannibal's dining table. It had only been a matter of time until he ended up here, he supposed. He had already been fed a lot of Hannibal's cooking, and Alana had warned Will that Hannibal was a big fan of serving dinner to guests. Alana was probably just there to ensure that Will would agree to come.

"So, remind me how you know each other," Hannibal said as they began their starters. Will was not used to a meal which consisted of multiple courses, but he couldn't complain when it tasted so good.

Alana looked to Will as she spoke for the both of them. "Well, we worked at the Academy together before Will left."

"For the first time," Will added dryly.

"Well, yes," she agreed with a frown. She had since shared with Will how unhappy she had been about Jack's actions. Obviously, Jack had consulted with her about the idea of hiring Will and she had told him it was a bad idea. Jack had decided that she was right, but not soon enough. "We kept in touch after, though."

"Alana kept in touch. I'm not so good at keeping up with people."

Hannibal considered him. "A hard man to pin down, it seems."

Will took a sip of wine. "Not that hard, it would seem. We manage to keep bumping into each other."

Alana made a noise. It was most likely meant to sound like a hum of agreement, but it betrayed her disapproval. "You've both been seeing a lot of Abigail Hobbs, huh?" she asked as she speared a mouthful of salad.

Hannibal nodded. "Will and I both went through quite an experience with Abigail. It is hard to shake that experience, and hard to shake one another, too."

"And do you think it's the best thing for Abigail? For all of you?"

Will snorted. "I think that's called a leading question, Doctor Bloom."

Hannibal was unfazed. "I absolutely think it is the best course for all of us. Who could better understand her trauma than Will and I, who saved her with our own hands? She seems to be making good progress."

Alana's lips were set in a straight line as she looked between the two of them. "I want what's best for the three of you, so I'm going to be honest. I don't think you should keep seeing

Abigail Hobbs. Will, you should be taking a step back from the Shrike, not getting attached to his daughter. And Hannibal, you should know better. I think none of you will be able to process this trauma when you're constantly around one another as reminders."

Will put down his knife and fork. "Thank you for your honesty, Alana, but it's too late. We're in her life. Do you think it would be any less traumatic if we cut her off now?"

Alana's jaw was set. She looked at Hannibal as she said, "Then you should never have let her get attached in the first place."

Nights passed by much slower than the days. Every time Will closed his eyes, he was struck with visions of Garret Jacob Hobbs whispering to him. In his dreams, Will was the killer. He sliced Abigail open with one of the knives he used to gut fish. The wound was a bit deeper and Hannibal didn't put pressure on it quickly enough. She bled out at their feet.

He would wake up soaked with sweat, and his panicked, half-conscious mind would expect to see blood coating his skin. He never quite believed his eyes when there was no blood.

There were other dreams, too. Will recreating other crime scenes he had worked on: Cassie Boyle, old Ripper murders. Sometimes he saw the original victims, sometimes it was Abigail or Alana or Hannibal dying at Will's hands instead. Every night was filled with variations on the same fever dreams. He woke up at least three times every night, shivering and panting and more exhausted than when he had climbed into bed.

Jack had been wrong. It was exactly like last time, except now Will had invited a new killer into his mind, and when he woke up he couldn't reassure himself that he had never killed anyone. Garret Jacob Hobbs was dead because of Will. Abigail Hobbs was alive because of Will.

By five in the morning, Will was usually awake and unwilling to give sleep another attempt. He allowed himself an hour to calm down by drinking coffee on the porch with his dogs, then he got to work. The distraction was welcome, if not completely effective.

It was noon when a familiar car pulled into Will's driveway. The dogs barked at it.

He put down his tools with a frown.

"Doctor Lecter?" he called as the doctor stepped out of his car.

"Will. I hope this isn't an intrusion. I was in the area for the farmers' market and recalled that you live nearby. Could I interest you in some lunch?"

The dogs had calmed down now. Winston pressed his nose to Hannibal's hand and began trying to lick it when he received a pet from Hannibal. Hannibal seemed less obliging when his hand got covered in dog saliva, but his face remained clear of annoyance.

"How do you know my address?" Will asked, choosing to ignore the lunch offer for now.

"You are a mechanic and your home is your workshop. It was not a feat to search your name."

Will made a vague noise in response. Generally, he was not someone who welcomed unexpected guests, but he couldn't deny that he was hungry and Hannibal's cooking was tempting. "Sure, I think I can do lunch."

"Perfect." Hannibal opened his trunk to fetch a paper bag filled with fresh produce. "Would it disturb you if I cooked in your kitchen? It seems a waste, not to enjoy these ingredients whilst they are so fresh."

It would, of course, disturb Will, and Hannibal knew enough about Will to know that he would bristle at the foreign presence in his home, but it was too late to send Hannibal away. Hannibal was a persistent man. "Make yourself at home," he begrudged, waving a hand towards his front door.

Hannibal smiled and waited for Will to enter before following behind. The picture of good manners.

Will grabbed a beer for them both and sat at his small dining table as Hannibal got to work cooking.

"You don't have much food in your fridge," Hannibal observed. "I hope you make time to feed yourself properly."

Will took a swig of his beer. "I've been busy. At least I can rely on you to provide me with meals." It was a jab more than an expression of appreciation, and he was sure that Hannibal knew as much, but the doctor chose to interpret it however he wanted.

"It is my pleasure, Will. It is a difficult adjustment, fatherhood, and our situation is perhaps especially peculiar." Hannibal raised his beer in Will's direction and sipped at it. "We must support each other through this in whatever way we can."

Will recoiled slightly. "Fatherhood? You mean Abigail?"

"Of course. We watched her lose both of her parents. It was our hands which allowed her to survive. It is only natural that we should wish to act as fathers to her, since we failed to save her biological parents."

Fatherhood was not something that Will had given much consideration to. He had dated a woman, once, and for a while it had been serious enough that he had permitted himself to imagine a future with her. One with marriage and dogs and maybe even kids. There was an appeal to the idea of passing on his skills to his children. He could be a better dad than his

own father, and part of him wanted to have children for that reason alone: yes, partially as a fuck-you to his father, but also because there were kids who deserved better than what they had. Will could give them better.

But those were daydreams. They weren't grounded in reality, because if they were, Will would not be the father he imagined himself as. He knew what he wanted to provide to any potential children, but in the end he would fuck it up as much as his own father had. Will may not be an alcoholic, but he would open the bottle too early in the day and pour with a heavy hand. Fatherhood would not cure him of his bad dreams and abrasiveness and shaking hands.

Will let out a humourless laugh. "I am not Abigail's father. I killed her father. This isn't *The Santa Clause*, I don't inherit the role."

Hannibal began plating up vegetables and pan-fried fish. "I don't believe Abigail sees it that way. Whatever our feelings, we are paternal figures to her now. We must take care of her - and each other." He set their plates down on the dining table and retrieved cutlery for them.

Will took the opportunity to eat rather than speak. The food was simpler than what Hannibal tended to make, perhaps limited by Will's lack of ingredients, but it tasted beautiful. It was much more like the meals Will cooked for himself or the food from his childhood, rather than the meticulous, refined meals he usually provided.

Hannibal did not seem to enjoy the silence as much as Will did, however.

"Did she tell you of her plan?" Hannibal asked. Even though Will never made eye contact with Hannibal, it didn't stop Hannibal from constantly staring into Will's eyes.

"To go back to Minnesota?" The hospital had told Abigail that she could start leaving the hospital, and she immediately wanted to go home. He was sure that Jack would be more than happy to make that dream a reality.

"Yes."

"She mentioned it on Wednesday, yeah. Alana thinks it's a bad idea."

Hannibal was unconcerned, as ever. "Doctor Bloom also believes that Abigail being in contact with us is a bad idea. You do not agree."

Will hesitated. He had never said he disagreed with Alana about that, he simply chose not to listen. Really, he had no idea whether it was helping or hurting him to see Abigail so often. Abigail wanted to see him, so Will would continue to be a part of her life. "You think it would help Abigail to go back?"

Hannibal considered the question as he finished chewing his food. "I believe it could help her to confront reality and accept the changes that have occurred in her life. I also believe that Abigail is old enough to make her own decisions. All we can do is advise and support her."

Hannibal really did speak to Will like they were co-parenting. What did that mean about how Hannibal viewed Will? Did he insist on involving himself in Will's life because of their

shared experience? To ‘parent’ Abigail more effectively? Was he interested in Will? His stomach coiled at the thought of being married to a man. He wasn’t repulsed by the idea, but it seemed incorrect to picture either one of them married to a man. Although, would the picture look much more normal if it was a woman? He got the sense that both of them tended to hold back in personal relationships.

Surely, if Hannibal had close friends alongside both his psychiatry and his role with Jack, he wouldn’t have so much time to cook elaborate meals for Will and Abigail. In fact, he wouldn’t have time to attach himself to Will and Abigail in a bastardised attempt at forming a family. He wouldn’t push Hannibal away, but he wouldn’t welcome him in, either. Hannibal had promised that he would become interesting to Will. The promise was left as yet unfulfilled.

Will frowned and shook his head. He didn’t agree with Alana’s thoughts on Abigail, but that didn’t mean he agreed with Hannibal any more. “But we can’t let her go alone, can we? I have no doubt that Jack will be suspicious of Abigail right now. If there’s a way that Jack can use this to try to make her admit to helping her father, he will. If we let her go alone we’d be throwing her out to the wolves, Hannibal.”

Hannibal laid one of his palms on the table between them, as if Will’s hand was balled up beneath his and Hannibal could absorb the tension through his skin. “Abigail would not be going alone. I would be there beside her. She is my ward and I can protect her from Jack. And I am a psychiatrist, I can make sure that this trip doesn’t hold back her emotional recovery. I promise to keep her safe, Will.”

Will fists tightened around his cutlery. “Okay. As long as you keep her safe.”

Hannibal inclined his head and gave Will a soft smile. “Always.”

Beverly grinned and pulled him into a brief hug when she saw Will. So much physical contact was something Will usually avoided, but he appreciated that she kept it short.

He had tried to cancel, but Beverly was hard to argue with. She wasn’t put off by Will being blunt, or even full-on rude. They had made this plan to share a drink almost a week ago, but when Will had agreed to the date, Abigail and Hannibal hadn’t booked their flights yet. As of that morning, they were in Minnesota. Will stayed in Maryland. Abigail had Hannibal and he needed to look after the dogs.

He had wanted to spend the whole day worrying about Abigail. He would work on the boats and check his phone every five minutes to make sure there was no text from Hannibal to say

it had been a bad idea, after all. He had told Beverly this when she asked why he was cancelling - though he phrased it quite differently - and she hadn't accepted the excuse.

"Well now it *really* sounds like you need a few beers," she had told him. He could imagine how her eyebrows would be raised as she said that. "C'mon, if you wanna spend all day worrying about Abigail, you can, but it might be better to get your mind off it for a second."

And she was right, obviously. It didn't even annoy Will when Beverly consistently proved him wrong. He had acquiesced, so now he was sitting in a bar just outside of Baltimore with the Thursday evening crowd. It wasn't so full that he needed to strain to be heard, but there were enough people to save them from the awkward silence of an empty bar.

Apart from casually asking how he was when they first grabbed a seat, Beverly didn't get Will to talk about his emotions. She never once mentioned her work or Jack or Abigail. She complained about a shitty date she had been on and made Will laugh as he went to take a sip of his drink. She made fun of Will for not realising she was a lesbian, despite how well he could supposedly read people.

She was easy to be around. Will's heart ached as he soaked in the moment. This was why she was the one he had missed, out of everyone and everything about his time with the FBI. He couldn't say it, but he hoped she would sense it.

His phone buzzed in his pocket. He stopped speaking mid-sentence to take it out of his pocket.

Hannibal.

"Uh… One second, I need to take this. Excuse me," he mumbled, leaving the table and picking up as he walked to the smoking area. "Hannibal? Is everything okay?"

Hannibal breathed in on the other end. It was bad. "Will. I'm sorry if I'm interrupting. I thought you would want to know: we just found Abigail's friend, Marissa, mounted on an antler wall in Hobbs's hunting lodge."

The breath left Will.

His heart ached for her. She had spoken to Will about Marissa. Jack was far from the only person who believed that Abigail could have played a role alongside Hobbs. She had been afraid that her friend would want to cut contact because of it, but Hannibal had sent him a text earlier to let him know she was in high spirits after bumping into Marissa.

Now, Hannibal gave him an overview of her murder, upon Will's request. She had been murdered in the style of Hobbs.

Killers could never die, could they?

Will got a plane ticket as soon as he could. Like fuck he was going to wait in Maryland until Abigail got back when she was being retraumatised so soon after her last trauma. His muscles

burned as he sat on the plane. If Marissa's killer was in front of him, he wouldn't hesitate to fire a few rounds straight through his neck. Or, no, that felt wrong.

He closed his eyes and inhaled deeply. In his mind, a scene played through smoothly. An anonymous man mounted Marissa's body onto the antlers and Will's fingers clasped confidently around the shaft of his gutting knife. They stood in a room made of nothing but black space with antlers hanging from a non-existent wall. Light came from somewhere behind the killer, but his shape was blurred. Will couldn't focus his eyes on it to be able to note any details, but it didn't deter him from lunging forward and locking the man in a chokehold. The killer swung his arms around and clawed at Will's grip, but it was useless. Will wrapped his other arm around to dig the knife into the killer's navel, shoving it in up to the hilt before tearing it upwards until it was disrupted by bone. The killer scratched at him in a last ditch attempt to cling onto life, then he went limp, only kept standing by Will's cradling grip.

Will felt his hands tighten on his knees and he opened his eyes.

He was in the backseat of a car. Hannibal and Abigail sat in the front. Will's eyes slashed from side to side as he tried to orient himself.

He had been on a plane. He had been on a plane to Minnesota, he had closed his eyes, and he opened them to see he was with Hannibal and Abigail. He must have made it to Minnesota. He was probably being driven back to the hotel now. But if Will had just fallen asleep, how had he gotten through the airport and into Hannibal's car? Had he even told Hannibal when his plane would land?

His breathing had gotten heavy. He glanced up to the rearview mirror and met eyes with Hannibal. He observed, but made no comment on Will's emotional state. Maybe he thought Will was getting upset because he was sharing a car with the two people who had seen him shoot Garret Jacob Hobbs, and now another girl was dead. Hannibal did not look concerned or sympathetic. Granted, Will couldn't see all of Hannibal's face, but he looked more assessing than anything. Calculating.

Fucking psychiatrists. They calmly observed breakdowns like they were waiting in line at the grocery store.

They ate takeout together in Hannibal's motel room and Abigail mentioned that Freddie Lounds had approached her.

"You can't trust Freddie," Will warned. His skin simmered. Freddie preyed on vulnerability. She smelt Marissa's blood in the water and went sniffing for a new victim. "She knows what you want to hear and she will use it to get what she wants from you. Anything you say to her can be twisted however she likes to tell an interesting story."

Hannibal did not contradict Will. Abigail's eyebrow furrowed and she looked down at her food.

"People already say whatever they want about me. What's the difference? At least this way I have a chance to let them know my side of things."

Will was reminded of how young she was. He gave up on trying to convince her. “We should get out of Minnesota. That guy, Nicholas Boyle, you think he’s the one who did it?” He directed this question to Hannibal. He may not be a neutral party, but he worked to catch killers. Will trusted his judgement on this.

Hannibal nodded. “I am inclined to believe so, yes. Jack has told me that he thinks it best if we leave Minnesota as soon as possible.”

“I want to pick up some stuff from my house before I go,” she insisted.

“We can drive there now,” Hannibal suggested. He turned to look at Will. “Though perhaps it would be quickest if we left Will to pack up here while the two of us collected your things. After all, I am sure the press will still be there. There’s no need for them to have pictures of Will, too.”

Will wanted to protest. He had jumped on a plane to be there for Abigail and he didn’t want to be sat alone in the hotel room gathering together their luggage. He wanted to make sure Abigail was okay. Hannibal was right, though. He didn’t want another part of Abigail’s life to be photographed and broadcast to the world. Will nodded his consent.

“Okay. Let’s go,” Abigail agreed, putting down her fork.

Will sat in the hotel room. He had finished packing up their things soon after Abigail and Hannibal had left. It shouldn’t be taking them so long.

It wasn’t really a shock, then, when he saw an incoming call from Hannibal. His heart clenched nonetheless. He needed to know how bad it was.

“What’s wrong?” Will asked.

“Cassie Boyle’s brother attacked Abigail and I. Neither of us were badly hurt, but Boyle escaped.”

And so Will was left with even more anger for the world and pain for Abigail, and no outlet to release this destructive energy. Will was the kind of tired where an ache had crawled into the marrow of his bones, but he didn’t sleep on the late flight back to Baltimore or the car ride back to Hannibal’s.

Abigail slept in the guest bedroom and Will took a trundle bed. If he slept, it only came in fevered, half-conscious dreams that blended in too closely with reality.

Chapter End Notes

i keep forgetting to say that i am once again on tumblr @hornysurmaine. u r welcome to send me messages about hannibal (or just call me some slurs, idm xxx)

Chapter 4

Abigail was back in hospital. Safe, ostensibly. The thought brought no relief to Will.

“I’m worried about her,” he told Hannibal as he retrieved a good bottle of whiskey from a living room cupboard. Will’s car was back at his house, so Hannibal had brought Abigail back to hospital that morning and insisted upon bringing Will home, too. It was only right to invite him in. Will could do with it, he realised. Someone else who understood all of the tangled up emotions he had about Abigail.

“Abigail has dealt with more than her fair share of trauma already, and she is not yet a woman,” Hannibal agreed. He accepted a tumbler, but poured himself a much more conservative glass than Will had done. “We wish to protect her from the world, but the world is everywhere. I would do anything to undo what she has been through, but we cannot rewind time. All three of us have been through a lot and survived. Abigail is strong, Will. She will survive this.”

Will nodded absently as he fixated on a spot on the floor. He was surprised that the words did manage to somewhat ease his pain, but something sickly continued to squirm at the centre of his emotional tangle. “I have more empathy for Jack’s situation, now.” He gave a bitter laugh.

There was no perceptible change in Hannibal’s demeanor, but Will sensed Hannibal’s interest radiating from his body. “You feel responsible that you did not stop Abigail from going to Minnesota and she was hurt. Jack was responsible for you, and he let you get hurt. But Abigail wanted to visit her home. You did not want to work with the FBI.”

Will shrugged. “Some part of me wanted to be out there. I had done it before, I knew how it would turn out, and I did it anyway because I wanted to.”

“It feels good to save lives,” Hannibal agreed simply. “But Jack let you take a life, too.”

Will’s muscles twitched. His jaw and his hands. He faced his palms upwards and observed the workings of the muscles as he spread out his fingers. “It scares me. How I feel when I kill,” he admitted.

It felt like there were tears stuck behind his eyes. He was moments away from crying, but the final dam refused to come down. He wanted to raze it to the ground, to release everything he had bottled up. The fear for Abigail’s life, the guilt he felt for his part in destroying her life, the scene of Hobbs’s dying whispering to him in the kitchen, the obsession with murder. The loss of time.

Despite his best efforts, it all got stuck in his throat. He didn’t explain any further.

It had been a while since Will had invited someone over for dinner, but Alana had volunteered to take care of his dogs when he had rushed to Minnesota and he wanted to thank her. Will noticed the effort she put into maintaining their friendship and he knew that he didn't return half of the effort she devoted. It wasn't that he didn't appreciate it. He wasn't someone who needed to be around people often so he rarely had to initiate contact. By the time he wanted to see her again, she had already called him and invited him out somewhere.

Seeing her excitement as she knocked on his door with a bottle of wine almost made him feel guilty.

"Alana. Thanks. For the wine and for looking after the pack," he said, accepting a quick hug and kiss on the cheek as she entered.

"Oh, it's no trouble. Really, feel free to go away more often. I'd be happy for the excuse to see more of these guys." She gave him a teasing smile and crouched to pet the dogs that had formed a squirming circle around her.

"Well, you don't need to wait for me to leave to come see them. You can always visit while I'm here. Two birds with one stone." He wasn't lying, he realised. He might not regularly seek out company, but there was rarely a time when he wasn't happier for her presence.

She stayed crouched, absently petting the dogs, but her soft, adoring look was directed at Will, now. "Thank you," she said.

An awkward smile tugged at his lips. "I should finish dinner. Do you want a drink?"

She accepted. She leaned against a counter and chatted easily as he finished cooking. She made him laugh and she challenged him openly but without malice. It had been a while since his life had felt so simple. Will, Alana, his dogs, dinner and drinks.

When they had finished eating, Alana insisted on washing the dishes as Will dried them and put them away. They didn't speak much as they cleaned up. Their silence was as comfortable as their conversation.

A low, insistent noise came from somewhere in the house. Or, no, Will knew this sound. It was scratching on the door, coming from outside. The dogs had been shut outside during dinner to make space and one of them had clearly decided they had been outside long enough.

"One minute, sounds like the dogs are missing you," he said, hanging his tea towel from a cabinet.

The sound got louder as he approached the door and stopped as soon as he opened it. The dogs were spread across his yard, most of them lazing about, but they trotted inside when

they saw their owner. None of them had been on the porch. He frowned and whistled to hurry up the stragglers who remained outside, closing the door when he counted all seven inside.

In the kitchen, he could hear Alana praising them. Outside, he could hear the scratching again. It was coming from the door. It was loudest when he was directly in front of the door and it had stopped when the door opened, so it had to be coming from the door.

He reopened the door. This time, the noise continued. He stepped out onto the porch, looking for a raccoon or rat or some other creature that could be the source of the noise. There was nothing.

“Will? You okay out there?” Alana called, her footsteps approaching.

He cleared the frown off his face. “Yeah, just trying to find out where this noise is coming from. I think I might have rats.”

Her eyebrows raised. “Rats?” She paused, listening.

The dogs shuffled inside, their claws clicking against the wooden floor, and the other sound became increasingly grating and steady. It was no longer such an animal sound. Now, it sounded focussed, as if gouging deep grooves into the wood.

“I don’t hear anything. Where’s it coming from?”

Will swallowed and he shook his head. “I can just hear it faintly. Maybe they’re in the walls or the floor. I’ll put traps down tomorrow.”

There was a long second before Alana suggested, “Maybe you should get a cat. That’d solve your rat problem.”

He forced a smile. “You just want to use my house as a private petting zoo.”

She straightened up, her knees cracking as she raised from her crouched position. They were looking at each other on a level. When she had been lower down, she hadn't seemed to be so close to Will, but now, Will almost felt the need to take a step back. "You're the one who gave me an open invitation to visit," she pointed out, and then they were left in silence as Will tried to come up with a fitting response.

There were a lot of reasons why Will did it. His brain felt worn down. Like a tyre that needed replacing. Or like a healing wound. A deep, scabbed over graze on his knee that kept cracking open along the same seams, bleeding into his clothes. He couldn't find a witty response. He felt trapped in his body and his brain. They didn't feel as if they belonged to Will right now. He didn't feel like his self was contained within his brain, it was more like his self was fighting against his brain, was being betrayed by his own brain.

So maybe he wanted to be free of his brain for a minute. He could slip into muscle memory, old trained responses that he would have done unthinkingly a few years ago. Like instead of stepping away from Alana as his knee-jerk response demanded, he leaned into her and

activated an older instinct to connect with her. Two magnets, momentarily seeming to press away from one another, before resolving to click smoothly together.

They kissed. It wasn't something that Will solely initiated: as soon as she had sensed Will moving closer, she had been drawn closer to him, leaning up to touch him. Will felt immediately breathless and light-headed. They parted and reunited a few times, each time finding it easier to fit together. They were united, too, in the abrupt hesitancy and desire for distance that swelled up in their throats.

Will turned his face away and straightened up as she released him and put a step between them.

Alana was stable and comfortable. When they had met - when they had been equals who were allowed to flirt and kiss, when power dynamics and questions of stability were yet to arise - it had been a different time. Will had been happier, yes, but he had been a different Will. Back then, he hadn't been a killer. There had been no Abigail or Hannibal.

"We shouldn't have done that," Alana whispered.

Will let out a laugh. It tasted bitter in his mouth. "No, we shouldn't have."

Alana took a step back and cleared her throat. "I do like you, Will."

"Just not like that," he finished for her, although he didn't necessarily think she had been going to say that.

Her lips were parted around words she couldn't string together. "I don't know."

That was the problem.

Will wanted Alana, maybe. Some part of him was attracted to her and wanted to kiss her and love her, but it didn't feel true. His brain was breaking and fracturing into pieces and he didn't know how to glue it back together. He didn't know if it would look the same when he finished, and maybe it was an older version of his brain that had matched Alana's brain.

"I'm sorry," he told her.

"You don't have to apologise." She reached out and squeezed his hand, but the contact was over before Will could respond in kind. "Look, I just don't know if it's right for us at the moment. I think we need some time to think before we decide if this is right for us."

She was right, but she was also hiding an inevitable truth. They would take time to think this through and they would mutually decide that they were better off as friends. They knew this because they had already done this once before, when the FBI had first started breaking and resetting Will into the man he was now.

When Will had first worked with Jack, Alana hadn't helped with the cases, but she stayed close to Will and checked in on him. She had refused to be a psychologist to him and she had refused to report to Jack on Will's mental state, but how could she avoid it? She was his friend so she saw how it broke him down, how the Ripper had become a parasite in his mind,

so naturally she had voiced this to both Will and Jack. Equally, Will had gotten in too deep to feel able to stop and Jack didn't want to hear it, so she was ignored. Their relationship, which had deepened into something more honest and almost romantic, was put on hold by her worries for his mental state and her concern that Will had become something too close to a patient. They had never discussed it, not really, but they had drawn apart even as she kept in contact and Will's mind became more stable.

Nothing had ever happened, so they lost nothing more than the fantasy of what could've been.

"It's late," Will said, although it wasn't yet 7:30. It was dark outside, so he could get away with saying it.

"I should go," Alana agreed, but she had to force herself to say it.

"Thank you for coming tonight." He hesitated before reaching out to brush his fingers over the back of her hand. His hand fell back to his side.

"It was good to see you." She shuffled her handbag so the strap sat over her shoulder. "See you soon."

They shared a soft smile and she left. The dogs tried to follow her out but Will whistled them back inside.

He stood behind the door for a few minutes after the sound of her car engine and tyres over dirt faded. He grabbed his keys and locked the door behind him. It didn't feel like a decision to drive to see Hannibal. It didn't occur to him that he should call in advance. It was as if this had always been the expected end of this evening.

"Will," Hannibal said as he opened the door. His eyebrows were raised, as if in surprise or expectancy. The air inside Hannibal's place was warm but not humid and smelled of well-cooked food.

"Hannibal. Am I interrupting something?"

"Not at all. I just ate dinner with a guest, but I'm afraid he had to leave suddenly. This is to your benefit, as we were yet to eat dessert. Will you join me?"

Hannibal opened the door further in invitation and Will obliged by stepping inside. "I just kissed Alana Bloom," he announced. It felt like something that needed no preamble.

Hannibal's stride didn't falter as he led Will to the dining room. He pulled out a chair and gestured for Will to sit in it. He observed Will's face as he asked, "Did you enjoy it?"

"Yes. And I don't regret it, but it wasn't right. It's not how we're supposed to be." He sat down, his hands settling on his lap.

"How should your relationship with Alana be?" The question was called over Hannibal's shoulder as he went to retrieve the desserts. It was supremely casual, and Will appreciated it and smarted from it in equal measure.

He had expected this to hurt Hannibal, he realised. There wasn't a perfect term to describe the relationship they shared, but 'friends' suggested both more and less than the reality of it. 'Co-parents' intimidated Will, although he could recognise a truth in the phrase. Will had never actively considered whether Hannibal had romantic feelings for him, but he supposed that part of him had assumed that, yes, Hannibal must see Will that way.

It felt unnecessary to consider Hannibal's sexuality as part of this question. Hannibal would have an almost Ancient Greek view on sexuality, Will sensed. It would be homosocial and power-based and different to modern sexuality. He would not describe what he felt for Will as sexual or homosexual, it would simply be natural. It would be as Achilles had loved Patroclus: unquestioningly, unendingly, as two halves of one soul.

Maybe that was why Will's own sexuality felt unthreatened by Hannibal's assumed interest. It was less uncomfortable than unwanted interest from a beautiful woman. Will felt no guilt for the lack of reciprocity. He had only ever loved women.

But Alana. He wasn't in love with Alana, and maybe he never had been. "Alana and I should be as we are now. Friends." It never was and never would be as simple as 'friends', but they could continue to strive for it.

"Why, then, did you kiss her?" Hannibal ate a spoonful of his panna cotta, and Will followed suit to give himself time to stew over his answer.

It was perhaps a more loaded question than Hannibal realised. Or maybe he knew perfectly well and asked anyway. "I thought I heard something scratching at the door, but there was nothing. I was imagining it, and Alana knew I was imagining it but she wouldn't say it. I think I just wanted to stop looking at that expression on her face, and kissing her made me feel safe."

Will had not meant to be so honest. He had intended to be vague. It was just so easy to talk to Hannibal, for some reason. The realisation both soothed and panicked Will.

"You have been hearing sounds?" Hannibal enquired. There was no evidence of concern or surprise at this admission.

"Not often. I see or hear things, but I know it's not real. I haven't been sleeping much lately - I've been sleep-walking and getting nightmares." He shook his head and shrugged. He had killed someone. Of course he wasn't feeling his best lately.

Hannibal inhaled deeply through his nose, as if centering himself. Will's brow twitched into a frown. "You must take care of yourself, Will. You are processing your new role as both father and killer. It will take time to emotionally adapt."

Will's spine straightened. "Yeah. I just need to get some more rest."

"Abigail said you are going fishing together tomorrow morning."

"Uh, yeah, I wanted to get her out of the hospital for a while."

"It is already late and I live closer to Abigail. Sleep in my guest room. You will be able to rest more that way."

Naturally, Will was repelled by kind offers like this; he had been raised to refuse help whenever possible. Somehow, Will felt weakened, as if his lack of rest was weighing down his bones and making it harder to fight. "That's- Thank you, Hannibal."

"It is my pleasure."

Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will woke up at about six in the morning. Usually, he woke up at least three times in the night, and every few nights he became conscious of his surroundings as he stood in the kitchen or outside his house. He had woken up sweaty when it was still deep in the night, but that had been the sole disturbance.

He had slept in his boxers, but he put on the sweatpants and t-shirt that Hannibal had lended him to appear downstairs. It had been a surprise when Hannibal had provided him with normal clothes, really. He had expected a silky pyjama set with a button-up shirt.

When he reached the kitchen, Hannibal already sat at the island drinking coffee and reading on his laptop.

"Good morning, Will. How did you sleep?" Hannibal was wearing a navy set of pyjamas and a similarly coloured dressing gown, more like a silky kimono than the tatty flannel dressing gown Will had back home. Hannibal’s hair was neat, but less styled than usual. He looked well-slept and alert.

"I actually slept very well, for once," he admitted.

"I am glad to hear it. There is coffee in the cafetière. What could I interest you in for breakfast?"

Will took a coffee for himself as he considered. He caught a glimpse of Hannibal's laptop screen as he passed to grab a mug. Tattlecrime.com. He recognised it immediately and bit back a comment. They settled on a croissant and fresh fruit for breakfast - dark berries and crisp apple.

They shared their breakfast in silence. It was almost comfortable, but Will's thoughts about Freddie Lounds stuck to the roof of his mouth.

"Is there something on your mind, Will?" Hannibal asked, pushing a strand of hair that had fallen across his forehead back into place.

Will put down his mug of coffee. "I noticed you were reading Tattlecrime."

Hannibal inclined his head in a humble apology. "I want to be familiar with Freddie Lounds, as Abigail is considering working with her." He paused. "I admit, I had hoped you had not noticed. I thought it may upset you to be reminded about the Ripper."

Will frowned. "Why would it remind me of the Ripper?" Sure, the Ripper and Will's mental state used to be two of Freddie's favourite topics, but she had barely spoken about the Ripper

in two years. The occasional update piece or the suggestion that a new brutal scene could be the Ripper's work, but journalists had quieted down since the Ripper had gone silent.

There was a small movement in Hannibal's hand, not far off a flinch. His eyebrows raised. "You haven't heard? I assumed you would be the first to know, given how involved you were with the cases."

"Show me the article."

Hannibal hesitated, but turned his laptop around and nudged it towards Will. Will lifted it to the edge of the table and skimmed through the piece. He frowned. Googled 'Abel Gideon'. His frown grew deeper. He scoffed and pushed the laptop back towards Hannibal. He didn't want to read any more.

"Another classic piece of journalism by Freddie Lounds. Entirely baseless and sensational."

Hannibal seemed to perk up. "You do not agree that Abel Gideon is the Chesapeake Ripper? How else would he know how to recreate a previous Ripper scene?"

"Maybe he's a fan, or a friend. Or someone could have fed him that information. He's under Frederick Chilton's care, for fuck's sake. He's not the Ripper. He doesn't fit the profile at all."

"If Abel Gideon is not the Ripper, who is?"

Will shook his head. Hannibal was asking difficult questions. He forgot, sometimes, that Hannibal was the new Will Graham. Jack was probably pushing Hannibal to become just as obsessed with the Ripper as Will had been. As Will still was.

"You know profiles don't work that way. When we find a suspect, we can use the profile to check if he fits, but we can't search through a database with a profile. But the Ripper doesn't commit crimes of passion. I doubt he ever had a wife or children. He is… lonely. He doesn't have connections because he doesn't see the people around him as human. They are just creatures, things to be slaughtered, either as a form of pest control or for meat… Abel Gideon isn't the Ripper."

Hannibal seemed to chew over the words. There was a quiet, appreciative look. Will could almost imagine that same expression on Hannibal's face as he watched a beautiful operatic performance. "I can see why Jack was so upset when you left the Academy."

Will huffed. He didn't dislike Jack, but he didn't like to be reminded of him, either. Reluctantly, he could admit that his feelings for Jack paralleled his feelings for his father. A damaged love, typical of the fool who gives blind, trusting love to a man intending to use him. The tired admission that, yes, these men had failed him repeatedly, but they had done it while genuinely caring for Will, even as they actively endangered him. "Don't trust Jack too much," he warned simply.

"I assure you, my trust is not easily won." He looked serious, and he sighed. "I apologise. I did not mean to bring up such a sensitive subject. You told Jack you were leaving the FBI, and I must respect that you don't wish to think about it."

Will shrugged. He tensed slightly at the implication that Hannibal would tread on eggshells around him. Sure, he would rather not think about the FBI, but he wasn't fragile. He could think and talk about it. "You can talk about the Ripper. I know what it feels like when Jack gets you working on these cases. You can never get too far away from them."

"No, we cannot. Perhaps we will always have to live with the Chesapeake Ripper," Hannibal mused.

Will didn't reply. *Yes*, he wanted to say, but worried that Hannibal did not feel as bonded to the Ripper as Will felt. Will felt like his being had been changed by the Ripper. Sometimes, he imagined or thought or desired things that felt foreign to pre-Ripper Will. It was like the Ripper's voice had crawled into his mind, and he couldn't imagine Hannibal understanding that. Sometimes, he thought about killing the people around him, and the details were too vivid for it to be a normal flash of anger. Sometimes, Will felt as if he was married to the Ripper. He could do with the Ripper signing the divorce papers so he could fucking move on.

"I should head out soon to meet Abigail," Will announced. Hannibal responded by clearing away their dishes.

"Yes, of course. Please, I keep some spare clothes in the drawers in the guest bedroom. Feel free to borrow anything you find, I don't want to make you drive home to change before you visit Abigail."

In all honesty, Will had resigned himself to re-wearing the same clothes, underwear and all, as long as he could use some of Hannibal's toothpaste and deodorant. With this offer, he felt he would expose himself as unrefined if he followed through on that intent. Displays of refinement weren't usually something that concerned Will. He wondered if this meant he really did see Hannibal as a co-parent. He had to prove his suitability as one of Abigail's carers.

To please Hannibal, Will mumbled a thanks and changed, bringing his used clothes in a reusable tote bag that Hannibal had provided him with. Will was never prepared enough to remember reusable bags, he just bought paper.

When he picked up Abigail and swung by a coffee shop on the drive out, she noticed that he wasn't wearing his own clothes. He didn't always factor in how perceptive she was. They were close enough to Will's style, and the trousers were his own from yesterday, but the shirt was tailored for Hannibal, slightly taller and broader than Will.

He explained that he had stayed over at Hannibal's after dinner, omitting the dinner he had shared with Alana before he saw Hannibal. He was sure that Abigail viewed the relationship between Will and Hannibal as homosocial, if not homoerotic, and these partial details would only reinforce her belief, but he didn't care to share his failed love life with her. He was always private about those matters and it felt wrong to discuss even something as innocent as romance with her.

Instead, he stuck to an area that he was almost as averse to discussing, but forced himself to talk about anyway: mental well-being. She may have been left physically healthy after Boyle's attack, but she had been shaken by it. "You know I'll keep you safe. If you need, we

can find you somewhere new to stay. You know… if it made you feel safer, you could stay with me or Hannibal. We won't let you get hurt again."

It was a struggle to put his heart on the table. No matter what Hannibal thought, Will didn't automatically become Abigail's father, although he had gone to the trouble of creating a vacancy in that position. Abigail did not look comforted by his words. She didn't look uncomfortable, just afraid.

"I'm not worried about getting hurt," she told him with a tone of finality. There was something she felt or thought or had done. It was a wound on her that she was not yet ready to let heal. She must hide her weakness, and Will must wait for her to offer out her wound for treatment. Sometimes Will felt connected to animals as much as he did humans, and it was in this simpler mindset that he best understood humans. They all worked in the same way; all variations on a theme. Almost all of them were the same.

He had decided to regularly spend time with Beverly. Between Beverly, Abigail and Hannibal, Will was almost starting to believe it was worth making an effort to spend time with people. They made life more comfortable. He realised he may never get the wife and kids that he had occasionally considered, but maybe he could have this. An unusual collection of friends who had formed a mismatched, imperfect family.

Since their last attempt at going to a bar had been cut short, Will and Beverly tried out a new bar spot to play pool and darts. At a time, Will had considered himself a decent pool player, but either his skills had degraded or Beverly was a much better player than any of Will's old friends. Will won one game as a fluke and was otherwise consistently defeated with ease, just erring shy of being an embarrassing imbalance of skill.

She chatted with him easily as she lined up and executed shots. "How's everything going with you three, then? With Abigail and Hannibal, I mean."

"Abigail is doing as well as she can be, I think. The shit with Boyle rattled her, but she's strong. She's living through it. And Hannibal is…" He had honestly barely discussed the attack with Hannibal. Hannibal's only concern seemed to lie with Abigail and her well-being, although it was Hannibal who had been more physically injured of the two.

"I don't know, I think he's well-equipped to deal with trauma. He's a psychiatrist." That was a detail that Will typically endeavoured to overlook. "It's weird sometimes, though."

Beverly shot him an amused look. "What kind of weird?"

Will propped his cue against a chair to take a sip of his beer. "Nothing bad. I think Hannibal might see me as something other than a friend, but maybe I'm reading into things. Even if he does, maybe he doesn't even realise it himself." It wasn't something he had thought about openly enough to provide a clear assessment of the situation to Bev. She looked unsurprised and almost pleased, so maybe he wasn't alone in his reading of the situation.

"No shit. I've not seen much of you together, but the shit I hear from Jack and Hannibal, it's like I'm working with your husband. It's not like he shoves it in your face, but Jack always mentions you, and Hannibal just drips with pride. It's like he sees you as his other half."

Will thought of Plato. He had told a story of how humans had been created with four arms and legs, two heads, two sets of genitals. They were split into halves when they dared to threaten to rise up against God, and since then humans were born as two halves of a whole. Only one person would be their *parfait ami* - their perfect friend, their soulmate. They spent their whole life searching for that one person. Will felt certain that Hannibal saw Will as his *parfait ami*.

"Okay, that's where I have to say chicken. I'm not ready to think about myself as a married man. Least of all as married *to* a man. Not exactly how I imagined my future."

Now Bev looked downright amused. "Okay, I'm sure Hannibal just thinks of you as friends." She didn't pretend to believe the words she said. Will shot her a glare.

"Anyway, you're the one with an interesting love life. What about you and Amy?" He hit a ball. One of his rolled into a pocket, but the cue ball had gotten trapped in an awkward spot. He lacked Beverly’s finesse. His second shot made close to no impact.

Beverly groaned dramatically as she bent forward to measure up her next shot. "Nothing interesting there. We're still texting and calling. It's going really well, to be honest. Usually if I don't see someone in person for a couple weeks, I realise that I don't like them enough to put the work into keeping in touch. But she understands that I don't get a choice about work."

She sighed. Will remembered that feeling, and he nodded in a way that he hoped would read as sympathetic.

"I was hoping to invite her over Friday evening, but with all these calls from Miriam, I'm expecting to be called in."

"Miriam?"

"Yeah, Jack's trainee."

For a second, Will thought it was strange that Hannibal hadn't mentioned her, but then he understood. Not a new trainee. Miriam Lass.

Will couldn’t remember whether he had ever met her. She had been a student at the Academy while he lectured there, but Jack had only taken an interest in her when Will had created a vacancy. Jack needed a new bloodhound.

Her disappearance had brought on a wave of survivor's guilt for Will. At some point, he had accepted that she was dead.

"Tell me about the calls."

Beverly's eyes widened. "I- I'm sorry, I thought you knew."

"Just tell me."

Her lips pressed into a thin line and Will watched her debate with herself before beginning to explain. "Jack's been getting calls with Miriam's voice. It's clips of the last call she made to him. We think it's the Ripper showing Jack that Gideon's not the Ripper. One of the calls came from Jack's bedroom and some of Miriam's hairs were found on the bed. He's taunting Jack."

"Do you think she's alive?"

Beverly lifted her shoulders in a slow shrug. "I mean. There's no way to know, not without a body or any sizeable quantity of blood. The Ripper doesn't keep pets, but he does play with his food. He could've easily just kept a few trophies, but he sure wants to put that doubt in our minds."

Will made a quiet sound of consideration. This had not been a subject he had wanted to consider tonight, but it would be impossible to stop at least passively processing it for the rest of the evening, and likely many more evenings to come.

"Damn, we don't have to think about this right now. I shouldn't mention anything about work, I just thought, between Hannibal and Jack and Alana…" Her eyes had gone so soft.

Will shook his head. "Don't worry, Bev. Hannibal would've mentioned it soon enough, and I'm the one who asked."

"Okay…” She didn't look fully absolved of her guilt and Will was keen to stop seeing this painfully open expression.

"C'mon, I took my last shot ages ago. Are you afraid of getting beaten again?"

She snorted. "Sure, as if I didn't give you that win out of pity."

She let him change the subject, and Will spent the rest of the evening doing his best impression of someone who was mentally present. He played through a hundred different versions of Miriam Lass's life and death in his head.

It had just passed noon, and Will was once again driving to Hannibal. He had called Hannibal last night, as soon as he got the text: two men dead in Hannibal's office. Will felt like everything he touched, no matter how fleetingly, was left poisoned. If he stood in a field, he almost believed that he could look down at his feet and see how the plants would wither and die in a perfect circle around him. He had wanted to drive to see Hannibal, to apologise and support him through this, but Hannibal had insisted that he was fine and Will should stay home.

It was a relief, really. Part of him itched to be near Hannibal, to check if he was alright and to voice his apologies, as if that would take away the heavy-weighing sense of responsibility that he felt for this. Outside of that, though, there was a much larger part of Will that didn't know how to voice his feelings correctly, and this grace period allowed Will to gather his thoughts so he could be more brief and restrained when he brought it up.

So, he brought a tupperware container full of catfish stew that he had made before he got the text from Hannibal. He had almost put it back into the fridge before he drove off, but he decided that Hannibal would appreciate the gesture, even if Hannibal's cooking was far more professional. Will took some pleasure in cooking and he did it fairly often - it helped that he almost always had a fresh catch that needed to be used up - but he cooked simply. He had a restrained spice collection and he never used recipes. He knew what tasted good so he cooked good food in the easiest way he could manage.

Will forced himself to stop thinking about it. It was stupid: the food was just a gesture and Hannibal would appreciate it. He never usually worried what people would think about his food because he was relatively confident in his abilities and he didn't particularly care if he served a mediocre meal. Why was it so different with Hannibal? Although he didn't view Hannibal as any form of competition, he somehow seemed to worry about whether or not he would measure up.

He got out of the car and knocked on Hannibal's door. He was quickly met with Hannibal. His lip looked like it had been split, but a quick once-over revealed no other visible injuries. He was dressed in neat charcoal pants, a grey plaid shirt unbuttoned at the top, and an emerald green jumper. It was less formal than Will was used to seeing him, and although he had already seen him in his dressing gown, this felt more intimate.

"Will." He seemed to enjoy saying Will's name. He said it often.

"I thought I'd drop in and see how you're doing, since I was going to see Abigail anyway. I brought some leftover stew. I don't know if it'll be quite up to your standards but I figured it was time for me to make up for all the cooking you do for me." He couldn't tell if he was over-explaining.

"I am sure I will appreciate it very much. Will you eat with me?"

"Sure," he agreed. He had brought enough for two.

Hannibal pulled out a pan to reheat the soup on the stove and began setting the table for two. “What will you have to drink? I have a new beer that you will enjoy.”

Will shook his head. “Oh, no, I’ll be driving after this, just water.” His drinking had long been something he was aware of. It hung in a delicate balance that always managed to skew just into the area labelled ‘not yet a problem’. He was finally trying out turning down alcohol more often.

Hannibal raised an eyebrow but obliged.

Will took a sip of his water then placed it on the counter and kept his eyes locked on it. “Look, I just wanted to say sorry. I feel like I’m the one who dragged you into this world and now someone tried to kill you.”

Hannibal placed a hand on his shoulder. “I assure you, Will, that you did not drag me into this world. I was already part of it. I chose to work with Jack and this killer visited me in order to murder my patient, who I was treating long before I met you.”

Although Will was sure that Hannibal meant what he said, it didn’t soothe Will. “I still feel responsible somehow.” He looked to Hannibal. Other than his more informal clothing, there were few visible signs of what had occurred the night before. At least on the surface, Hannibal was unchanged by his experience. “How are you?”

“Physically or emotionally?”

“Both.”

Hannibal considered the words. “I was lucky to escape largely unharmed. I have a wound on my wrist and leg, but they will heal. Emotionally, I am still processing the event.” He paused, and for a second, something vulnerable flickered across his face. His voice was quieter when he spoke again. “How did you process it, when you killed Abigail’s father?”

Will felt as if ice crystals were forming in all of his muscles, at the marrow of his bones, and his lower back was caught in a cycle of freezing and thawing. His blood moved cold through his veins. “I don’t think I’ve finished processing it yet. I think I’ll never just feel one thing about it, it’ll always be complicated. But he haunts me.” Maybe it was the sickly feeling in his body that distracted him enough to strip him back to unrestrained honesty.

“The people we kill live on inside of us,” Hannibal agreed. This was something that Will found oddly soothing about Hannibal: he moved fluidly with Will. Whenever Will bared himself, Hannibal met him with unhesitating acceptance and understanding, even if the thoughts he exposed were ugly and graceless. “Some killers eat their victims to keep them alive as part of their very flesh. It appears that we have managed to achieve this goal.”

Will huffed a bitter laugh. “And we didn’t even have to eat them. Lucky us.”

Hannibal shared the dark humour in this, letting a smile crawl across his lips.

Will decided that he had been wrong earlier, when he had thought that Hannibal seemed unchanged by his experience. Hannibal was transformed in Will's eyes, now that he was a verified killer. Perhaps there was a comfort in seeing another man who was marred by life, someone who had been caught doing ugly things. Taking life and watching life be taken. They could both speak to killers and see the human in front of them. They could see themselves in the killers; they saw killers in the mirror. There was something gentle to this shared ugliness, shared brutality.

Before, Hannibal had been a nuisance, another unwanted psychiatrist to deal with. Then he had become an easy source of comfort, though a boring one, like how he would be comforted by shitty daytime television when he was lying in bed, sick. This was a new Hannibal, and Will could finally see them as two sides of the same coin.

He understood why Hannibal saw them in images of Achilles and Patroclus, now.

Anything Will had said to Jack Crawford about leaving the FBI had been a joke. The job had been ruining him, and no amount of money or empty promises could convince Will to put his mind through that, but quitting the job meant next to nothing. Hannibal and Tattlecrime provided Will with all of the newest details. At first, it had been Hannibal off-handedly alluding to details from his work with Jack, then Will had actively engaged with the news about Gideon, which led to Will asking for updates. As a caring friend may ask about a friend's issues at work.

And then Will was getting another call from Jack, and this time discussing with Hannibal seemed to have somehow weakened him. Jack wanted to hear Will's thoughts 'off the record', and Will knew it was the best way to find out the latest details about the Ripper, and that was the only thing that could force Will to work for Jack in any capacity.

"We found Miriam Lass's arm. The Ripper led us right to it," Jack told him. His tone could be mistaken for cold and professional, but Will could hear everything below that, the notes of barely restrained grief and frustration and desperation.

"Well, I suppose if anyone still thought Gideon was the Chesapeake Ripper, now they'll know." It sounded harsher out loud than he had intended. In his mind, it had managed to sound solemn, but the words seemed to spill out onto the floor like spikes.

"Yeah, the Ripper sure as hell cleared that one up for us."

Will pulled in a breath of air through his teeth. He grasped his forehead with one hand, screwing up his eyes behind the shield. "I'm really sorry, Jack. I'm sorry for what he's

putting you through, but I meant it when I said I couldn't help you. I think that - I'm not at breaking point. I'm broken. And I can't be around killers when I'm like this. It's not safe, for anyone."

Jack made a noise. He seemed to silence himself before he had managed to speak even a full syllable. A couple more seconds passed, and the atmosphere seemed to deflate when Jack finally spoke. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have called. I'm desperate, Will."

Will nodded. He realised that this was probably one of the hardest apologies that Jack had made. "I know. But the Ripper can be caught. He will be caught."

"I sure hope that day comes soon." Jack hung up, and Will understood that this was not intended to be a slight or to appear abrupt, it was just that Jack had no time for formalities right now.

Chapter End Notes

for reference: the 'parfait ami' stuff which will mentions actually comes from french renaissance poetry about plato's symposium, not the symposium itself. i decided that will is familiar with french renaissance poetry bc if im being forced to study french renaissance poetry, im at least going to put that knowledge to good use (i.e. by referencing it in my hannibal fic)

also ive just started writing the first draft of chapter 9 and..... honestly even if u guys hate this fic idc bc im literally so hyped abt the next few chapters >:)))

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

It was a Sunday, and Beverly had asked to drop by to talk shop with him. She wasn't a trained mechanic, but she had done a decent amount with her family when she was younger, and then on her own car to save money on trips to the garage. She wanted to use Will's tools to fix up a motorbike, and Will had offered to help her with it, if she would like. She had been pleasantly surprised by the offer.

"Hey there, Will," she called as she got out of the car. Will was drinking coffee on his porch so he could be with the dogs as they played outside.

"Hi Bev." She pulled him into a very brief hug. She understood he had a low tolerance for physical touch, but he could enjoy these moments. "So, do you want anything to drink or do you just wanna talk shop?"

"I'm good for a drink right now, I'll just borrow your expertise if you don't mind."

"Sure." He motioned towards the wooden, barn-style building that he used as a workshop and began making his way inside. "Do you know what kind of bike you're getting?"

Beverly gave a sheepish smile. "I was kinda relying on your mechanic knowledge and connections to direct me to a decent, relatively-affordable fixer-upper." She adopted a more stern expression to say, "You don't need to help, though. I know enough to be able to fix it up myself if you can't be bothered with it, I mainly just need the tools."

Will scanned the space and soon located the correct spot. He needed to move a couple kayaks and a bicycle, but there was a motorcycle underneath it all. "Luckily, I know at least one mechanic who has an old bike you can fix up. I got this a couple years back as part of a swap with a friend. She was trying to convince me to start riding." He pulled it upright and kicked the stand out to display it. "I'm never going to do anything with the damn thing and it was free. So if you want to make use of it, go ahead."

Beverly's amused smile turned to an open-mouthed grin. "For real?"

Will shrugged and gestured to the bike. "She's all yours."

"Fuck yeah, dude!" She approached to get a better look. It was all black and sleek. It looked like it could be used for races. "Tell me about her."

"Well, it's a 2007 Suzuki. I think… a GSX-R600? But don't hold me to that. It needs some work - new chain, fresh oil. The oil pan could do with being replaced, really, but we could patch it up with a welder if you wanna save some money. Nothing too difficult, if you know what you're doing. It could be a good bike, if you wanted it."

“It’s cool as shit,” she decided.

“Great, then you can take her. We should be able to at least get started now.”

“Hell yeah, let’s do it. Tell me what to do.”

They worked in an easy rhythm. This was what Will did every day to earn a living, and he really did love it. He usually worked completely alone, but it was useful to have another set of hands, or someone who he could direct to do one task while he got on with something else.

Beverly didn’t know all the terms, but she learned quickly and executed every task with a practised ease. Most of the time, they only spoke to communicate about the work, and otherwise focussed their attention on their work. Occasionally, though, they would share random thoughts or recount stories about past projects, how they had learned, what their dream project was.

Though they no longer worked together in the FBI, Will was glad to share this work with Beverly. He got to spend time with Bev without the pressure of having to fill every silence, because there was always something for him to busy himself with. Without the ever-present pressure of a case hanging over Will, he could just slip into the rhythm of joking and chatting with Beverly, and there was no morbid scene in front of them to make it feel inappropriate.

Whatever was wrong with Will’s brain, he felt sure that leaving had been the right decision.

Will now regularly checked TattleCrime for updates on the Ripper. He resented himself a bit because of it, but not enough to stop.

It was on TattleCrime that Will found out about Boyle. Found dead. Early reports suggested that he had been opened up with a hunting knife, as if to be butchered. His body was buried then dug back up.

The thought slithered up his throat and into his brain. That night, when Abigail had been attacked…

Hannibal had been there.

That fact did not reassure Will. He believed that Hannibal would do almost anything for Abigail. It only served to raise more doubts. Would they both lie to him about something like that?

Will knew the answer, but that didn’t mean that they *had* lied to him.

He called Hannibal.

“Good evening, Will,” Hannibal greeted.

“Hannibal. I wanted to know whether you would be free for a drink tomorrow evening.” He walked from one side of his living area to the other, keeping his steps silent, letting one hand trail across the mantelpiece.

A small noise escaped Hannibal. He seemed to have taken Hannibal off-guard with his abruptness, but it seemed welcomed. Hannibal sounded pleased. “Of course. I can always make time for you, Will.”

“Great,” Will said. He appreciated Hannibal’s openness, but it set off an instinct in Will that made him want to run. “I’ll see you tomorrow then. At mine. You can come any time after work. I could make us dinner.”

“That sounds perfect. I look forward to seeing you.” Will could picture the look on Hannibal’s face. Not smiling too widely, but quietly satisfied.

“Okay. See you.” Will hung up.

A night had passed, and the new sun had once again darkened. Hannibal had knocked on the door and entered. He was dressed in a deep red tweed suit and he had brought a fruity white wine, a lower percentage than he often provided.

Will was preparing something different. For him, fish was something that he sometimes ate almost every day. Meat was a treat. So he had dusted off an old recipe book that had belonged to his grandma and made beef Wellington. He roasted potatoes, beets and carrots to go with it, and made an onion gravy. It wasn't as fancy as some of Hannibal's cooking, but it was tasty and comforting. It had been a good while since he had spent so long in the kitchen, but it provided him with the same focussed, productive silence that he appreciated about mechanics and fishing.

"Thank you for cooking for me tonight. I am much more used to serving the food," Hannibal told him. He stood straight and proper, holding his wine glass. He looked calm.

Will shrugged vaguely. "I like to cook. And we needed to talk. May as well have the conversation over dinner." He sliced the Wellington and began serving them both so they could move to the living/dining area.

"Ah, so you had a motive behind your invitation?" Hannibal prodded. He didn't appear offended by this realisation, but his demeanour had minutely changed. Before, his stance had seemed to be resting naturally, but now it was more posed, somehow.

Will didn't know what to say to that, so he moved their plates to the table, where cutlery and Will's wine glass had already been laid out.

Hannibal sat down and folded his napkin over his lap. "I will admit, when you called me, I had wondered whether this was intended as a date."

Will froze mid-motion as he had been about to take his first bite. "What? No. I mean- no." He coughed into his napkin. "No, this is about Abigail."

Hannibal processed this silently and nodded. He didn't seem to be offended by the miscommunication, he took it in his stride. "Are you concerned for her?"

"Should I be?" Will asked. He didn't expect a response. Hannibal was beginning to eat his meal. "I read Freddie's latest article. The one about Nick Boyle."

"As did I."

"I don't suppose any of it was news to you, though, was it?"

Hannibal swallowed his food impassively. "No, it wasn't."

Will had expected more resistance. "Did you help her?"

"Only to hide the body. He was already dead when I found them."

Will felt as if he was dreaming. How could Hannibal calmly admit this?

"You didn't think to call an ambulance? It was in self-defence, right? So why did you lie?"

Emotion suddenly flooded Hannibal's face. He scoffed. "And leave her to the wolves? You know that people are already waiting for an excuse to tear her apart. She did what she had to do, but the media would say she was like her father. I did what I had to in order to protect Abigail."

Will cursed under his breath.

"Will you tell them?"

Will glared at Hannibal, but realised that he felt no real anger or malice. It was more of a sense of injustice at the situation that Abigail, and thus Hannibal and Will, had been thrust into. "I won't tell anyone. You're right, we need to protect her."

Hannibal inclined his head. It was a motion laced with gratitude and sympathy. “We are doing the right thing,” Hannibal reassured. He reached for Will’s hand and squeezed it firmly. His fingers lingered as he released Will’s hand.

It had been another layer of reassurance that Hannibal had wanted to give to Will, but it was more than that too. Will was reminded of the remark Hannibal had made: he had thought this might be a date. Hannibal was touching Will because he wanted to touch Will. It was as romantic as it was friendly. It embarrassed Will, to be touched by a man in that way. It didn't repulse or upset him. Being wanted was always reassuring; he appreciated the platonic part of the gesture, and with it he received the romantic element, which he was completely unable to form a response to.

It was overwhelming. Will couldn't recall a single other occasion when a man had touched him romantically.

Will realised that he had been frozen, probably with an expression of absolute shock, for at least a couple of seconds. "Yeah. Yeah, you're right," he agreed. He couldn't remember exactly what Hannibal had said. He hoped his response made sense. He didn't mean to act so taken aback by it. It was an unknown situation for Will, he didn't have a script for what to say or do.

The evening moved on after that. Hannibal didn't touch Will again. The tone returned to purely friendly. Nick Boyle was not mentioned again. The space between them didn't seem intentional or tense. They usually kept a bit of space between the two of them, they rarely touched. Will couldn't help noticing the space, nevertheless. Hannibal was not upset by Will's reaction, but it had changed how Hannibal acted with him. Hannibal thought that Will didn't want his touch.

Chapter End Notes

shout out to my trans femme friend for providing me with enough mechanics knowledge to bluff my way thru writing this chapter

reminder that u can also find me on tumblr @hornysurmaine <3

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

> ive been making lots of edits to the plan for how this ends and ive split up a couple chapters to pace it better, which means im further thru writing it than i thought! also ngl i just got excited to share this chapter bc i think this is where it starts to get properly interesting

Will sat opposite Abigail at Hannibal's dining table. Hannibal sat at the head. It was a Sunday, and Hannibal had suggested the three have dinner together at Hannibal's. Will had picked up Abigail while Hannibal prepared the food. The scene fitted together nicely. It was domestic.

They had eaten dessert, and Abigail said that she couldn't stay too much longer. She had a meeting tomorrow morning. With Freddie Lounds.

She admitted that detail with some reluctance. It was clear that she wanted no comment on the information.

"So you're still planning to write a book with Freddie?" Will asked. His tone sounded thoroughly unimpressed.

Abigail looked up at him. She did not plan to yield. "I'm still considering it. I think people need to hear my side. They'll talk about me either way."

He met her eyes. "What will you tell them about Nick Boyle?"

Her cool exterior cracked. She glanced at Hannibal. He gave her a nod. "Yes, he knows. He read Ms Lounds's article and he saw what had really happened."

Her face became desperate. This was the realisation of her worst fear. Her darkest truth, revealed. Or one of her darkest truths.

Will couldn't bear to watch her suffer. "Don't worry, I won't tell. It stays between us."

"I had to do it. He was trying to kill me. It was self-defence, it's just- it wouldn't look like it." She needed Will to believe her words.

Hannibal decided it was time to intervene in the conversation. "You did not enjoy killing Nick Boyle, Abigail?"

Her eyes snapped to him. She had gone completely tense. "Why would you even ask that?"

"Nick Boyle would have killed you. Sometimes, killing can feel just."

Abigail looked to Will for help. "You think killing is just?"

Will hesitated. He had hoped that Hannibal would press harder on Abigail and leave her question unanswered. Instead, he had turned his gaze to Will. There was already so much raw honesty shared between them. The shared admission that they were killers.

"Killing can feel just," Will admitted.

Abigail swallowed but her expression was blank. "Did it feel just when you killed my dad?"

"Yes," Will breathed out. His eyes slipped closer for a moment. He couldn't look at either of them; his eyes were boring into the centrepiece. A collection of fresh flowers and dark leaves and clean bones. "It felt right to kill him. It felt… good. To banish something evil from the world."

Hannibal inclined his head approvingly. "A heroic act. Powerful."

A bitter smile flashed across Will's lips. "Yes. It makes you feel powerful."

Abigail looked afraid, but it was her own hands she was looking at. "I. I should go back to the hospital, I need to get some rest."

Will began clearing the dishes away. "Sure, I'll give you a lift back. I should get home, too." He stood up to carry the dishes through to Hannibal's kitchen. Abigail and Hannibal had risen from their seats, too. "Thanks for the meal, Hannibal."

"My pleasure. It was good to see you both." He gave a small bow and showed them to the door.

It wasn't awkward, exactly. They all knew exactly what was happening. They had been absolutely honest, and it left them all feeling raw. None of them could say very much. Abigail and Will were quiet for most of the drive to the hospital. He was glad to be able to turn on the radio during the drive home.

He fell asleep quickly, but his sleep was disturbed. He had dreams that stained his awakened state with an aura of unease. He couldn't remember any specifics about the dreams - he had guesses that felt right, but he couldn't tell if his memories were real or his imaginings. Reality often seemed to pass through a filter before reaching Will. He didn't feel fully part of reality. It was something he watched on a TV screen.

The evening had been supposed to go like this: Will works, breaks for lunch, then works again until dinner time. After dinner, he goes on a walk down the beach with his dogs. Around eight in the evening, Hannibal would drop off a book Will had mentioned wanting to read. He might stay for a drink and a chat, or he might be tired and just chat in the doorway.

It had not gone as planned. Everything was fine until he was half-way through his walk on the beach. He got a text from Hannibal: he wouldn't be in the area to drop the book off, anymore. He had gotten a call from Jack because Abel Gideon had escaped from prison. They were worried that he was going to target past psychologists, such as Hannibal and Alana.

Will texted Alana, then called her as soon as she had assured him that he wouldn't be disturbing her. She was okay. She had a guard making sure she was protected, and she felt like she wouldn't be top of Gideon's list of potential victims. She was right. It was Chilton who should really be worried, but it didn't change the fact that her life was more under threat than usual.

He did his best to give comfort and sound like a good friend. She seemed as calm as it was possible to be in such a situation. They said goodbye, and Will sat in his living room and thought very deeply until he was tired enough to go to bed.

His dreams were once again filled with unpleasant images, but he remembered them better this time. He remembered holding a hunting knife in his hand and stabbing Hannibal in the stomach, wrenching it upwards to gut him. He stared down at his bloody hands, and when he looked back up, it was Garret Jacob Hobbs's face.

See? See?

Hobbs stared at a spot over Will's shoulder. He swung around and saw Abigail. There were tears in her eyes and her mouth was contorted around a cry of agony. Her neck was spraying with blood as she clumsily attempted to apply pressure on the wound. It wasn't Hobbs that she was staring at, though. Her eyes were directly on Will, covered in blood, holding a knife. She was stumbling away from him, glancing back at him as she struggled to create distance between them.

She believed Will would kill her.

Will awoke and checked the news right away. It was eight in the morning. There were already a few articles about the death of one of Gideon's past psychiatrists. He couldn't get his mind

off the idea of Hannibal or Alana being killed by him. It wouldn't be a quick or merciful death. It would be torturous, drawn out, intended to humiliate.

He spent as long as possible distracting himself from thoughts of Gideon, but it was a cold day. It was beginning to feel like real winter, and the cold numbed his hands as he tried to work, but working with his coat on made him burn too hot. He felt like an ill child in bed, kicking off their blanket then pulling it back up in an unending cycle. He couldn't remember all of what he did that day, but it was evening before he allowed himself to drive through the snow to Baltimore. To Hannibal.

He was sweating and panting when he knocked on the door. Hannibal didn't welcome Will in immediately, but he looked intrigued by Will's state. "Is something wrong, Will?"

"I- I read the news about Gideon, and I was worried about you, and now. I don't know what's real anymore. I feel separated from reality, I don't know what's wrong with me." He let out a desperate whimper. He found that he was almost crying. His brain felt hollowed out, like a maggot-riddled apple.

"Come inside, Will." He welcomed Will into his space. They walked to Hannibal's living room where Hannibal came close to hold Will upright. "Sit down, Will. Let me get you some water."

Hannibal helped him into a seat that he wouldn't be able to fall out of. He squeezed Will's shoulders before he walked out of the room. It was dimly lit and his whole body was trembling. Even sitting in the chair seemed to sap energy from his flesh. His blinks became longer. Each time he reopened his eyes, his eyelids seemed heavier. He couldn't tell if he dozed off during these blinks, but Hannibal wasn't back yet. Perhaps it had been seconds.

He looked around to remind himself of reality. He was in Baltimore. In Hannibal’s house. Hannibal would be back any second. There were reminders of his presence everywhere, in his books and the piles of his drawings, the decorations. The statue that had killed Tobias. He was sure that the story was that the podium had been knocked, it had fallen onto Tobias’s head, but as he looked at it, he watched Hannibal raise it above his head and crack it down onto Tobias's skull.

There was a sound from the hallway, and Will jolted upright and turned to face the sound. In the doorway to the living room, Garret Jacob Hobbs smirked at Will. It was Hobbs as Will had known him: wearing a button-up shirt, skin pale from blood loss, torso riddled with holes.

Will gasped for air. It hurt his throat.

"No. No, no, no, no, no," he murmured on a loop. He screwed his eyes shut and reopened them, but the image remained unchanged. It did not flicker. "You're dead," he insisted.

Hobbs looked amused. "Does that mean I'm a ghost?"

He saw, less clearly, a vision of Hannibal, bloodied, over the broken body of Tobias. This, he knew, was his imagination veering a bit too closely to reality. The real Hannibal must still be

in the kitchen, getting water for Will.

Will scrabbled for his jacket pocket to pull out a small pistol and train it between Hobbs's eyes. He ignored the apparition of Hannibal who was now assessing Will's situation.

Hobbs's eyebrows raised and his hands shifted as he took a step backwards.

"Don't move! Stop it!" Will waved his gun slightly, reminding Hobbs of his vulnerability. Behind Hobbs, Hannibal's image gave him a nod. Hannibal would accept Will, whatever happened. Hannibal had already seen so much ugly, raw, violent truth in Will. Hannibal saw exactly who Will was, and Hannibal loved him despite this knowledge.

Will felt like he was looking through the eyes of a slightly different version of himself. He felt changed. He felt as if he was suddenly aware of another truth within himself, a truth that Hannibal saw in him. Will saw who he was and who he would be and he unthinkingly did as that version of him would do.

Hobbs made a motion. He seemed to be opening his arms, as if to accept his second death. He was offering something to Will.

Will's body seemed overcome with tremors. His gun was no longer in his hand, though he didn't know where it had gone. Now, his hands were being steadied by solid flesh under his fingers. Hobbs was pinned underneath Will, writhing and floundering for air as Will crushed his windpipe. Hobbs swung lamely, trying to overthrow the balance of power. There were scratches being gouged into Will's arms and his face - he knew they were there, he could feel warm blood trickle from some of the deepest among them, could feel the cool air light up the newly exposed layers of skin. Will felt no pain. He panted and gently coaxed Hobbs towards his second death.

Eventually, Hobbs stopped moving beneath Will. Will did not move, either. His hands stayed locked in place like a choke collar.

Hannibal entered the room. He looked at the body, then at Will. The imagined Hannibal was nowhere to be seen.

"Tell me what happened. We will take care of this."

Will released his grip on Hobbs and scrambled a couple feet away. He was left on his hands and knees, and Hannibal lowered himself to Will's level. Will felt tears slip down his cheeks and he began to sob. Hannibal held him close and hushed him, whispering reassurances.

"I don't know who I am anymore."

Hannibal pulled back from their embrace and studied Will's face. "You are Will Graham and I see you. I know who you are."

Will regarded Hannibal: unphased by the fresh body, unaccusing, concerned. Hannibal would do anything for Will, as he had done whatever he had to do for Abigail.

In that moment, Will understood something. Hannibal had feelings for him in whatever intense, ungendered way he experienced attraction. Will's own sexuality had never been tested, and he had assumed he was straight, but he saw something in Hannibal. It wasn't necessarily an overwhelming physical attraction, though he appreciated Hannibal's looks. It was a deep understanding. It was a harmonising of their souls. Their bodies were unimportant. They felt like parts of the same being, torn apart and reunited.

Will was attracted to Hannibal in the same way as Hannibal was attracted to him.

"I killed Hobbs," Will said.

Hannibal glanced at the corpse beside them. "That is not Garret Jacob Hobbs."

Will screwed his eyes shut. He knew Hannibal was right - he had already killed Hobbs, weeks and weeks ago - but he couldn't work out the truth. He could only see Hobbs.

"It is Abel Gideon. He must have broke into the house while I left the room. I presume he was trying to kill me and found you, instead. Was he trying to hurt you?"

Will thought that Hannibal was filling in a lot of gaps. He didn't seem to be asking Will a question. He was proposing an idea. "Yes," Will breathed out.

"So we tell them the truth. Will Graham, the special agent who solved the Shrike case, came here to check on a friend. You defended yourself when your life was threatened by an escaped murderer. Gideon was armed." Hannibal was holding Will's face in his hands, avoiding the scratches but probably still getting blood on his hands. Hannibal had barely glanced at Gideon's body. Will wasn't sure that Gideon had been armed, but he trusted that Hannibal would make it the truth.

Will leaned forward and kissed Hannibal. It felt right. He was simply following his instincts.

Hannibal did not recoil, but he didn't reciprocate, either. He stayed motionless under Will's touch, and Will suddenly felt humiliated and perverted.

"I'm sorry," he whispered, sitting back on his heels to restore some space between them.

"You do not need to apologise," Hannibal told him. "I am worried about your mental state. You are hallucinating. Would you like us to try to find a cause?"

"Yes." He was shivering.

"I will call Jack. We will explain what happened, they will collect evidence, then we will help you, Will." He always spoke with so much certainty. Will was convinced that everything would happen just as Hannibal decided it would happen.

Will nodded, and Hannibal led him to a chair and took control of the situation. Will tried to work out what was real.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will was waiting in a hospital room. His face and arm had been bandaged. It both hid and highlighted his injuries. He had finished what would hopefully be the final conversation with Jack about Abel Gideon.

Hannibal had been right: it seemed like they were uninterested in arresting Will. As far as they were aware, it was a simple case of self-defence, mixed with a heroic desire to protect Hannibal. Everyone knew Gideon had already killed. It wasn't difficult to convince everyone that Gideon was trying to kill Will.

Maybe he had been trying to kill Will. Will didn't know. Although he could rewrite his memory of the evening to show Gideon instead of Hobbs, who knew whether that was a clear picture of the situation? Gideon was the only other person who had seen, and he couldn't share his side of the story. Hannibal seemed more sure of his account, including filling in the gaps with suppositions based on the available evidence.

Jack didn't care, Hannibal didn't care, so Will could choose to ignore the situation. The more pressing issue right now was Will's brain. He had come to the hospital to meet with Hannibal and a doctor who would be performing an MRI to figure out what was happening in Will's brain.

Hannibal and Will waited alone in the doctor's office. She had greeted them quickly and seated them there as she ran off to finish an appointment that was over-running. She would be with them in a few minutes.

Will placed his arms on the rest of his chair. "You were right. Jack seems fine with the Gideon situation. He thinks it's a simple case of self-defence."

Hannibal considered him. "Do you not believe you acted in self-defence?"

Will shrugged and his lips curled down. "I don't know." He paused. "How would either of us know? Neither of us was really present when I killed Gideon."

Hannibal nodded in acceptance of this fact. "But we can both look at crime scenes and know what has happened, regardless of whether we were present for the killing. I doubt Gideon broke into my home to have an amiable conversation with me."

That was true enough. He supposed that he had just hoped to be able to do more than deduce his experiences: he wanted to remember them, have faith in their reliability. Will had to look at his experience of reality as if it was a half-finished jigsaw puzzle with a few pieces missing, and a few extra pieces from another puzzle. He couldn't look at it and immediately know what he was seeing: it needed to be worked through, and some gaps or errors may always remain, left to be filled in with reasonable assumptions.

Will shook himself out of his thoughts. "But you backed Abigail up like this, even when you knew it was a lie. You seem very comfortable with lying to the police." He said it lightly. He had no reason to believe that Hannibal had any experience lying to the police, but it interested Will. When they had met, Hannibal had seemed so straight-laced, proper, academic, boring. This Hannibal, who told lies as easily as truths, was much better.

"I am comfortable doing what is needed to protect Abigail and yourself. I am comfortable lying in pursuit of your safety. Your well-being is what matters to me, which is why we are here." Hannibal spread out his hand to gesture to the doctor's office.

Will nodded. "Right. So we can just forget that I killed someone." It wasn't said with bitterness. It was disbelief, but not necessarily with any frustration mixed in. It just felt impossible. He had taken a life, unaware of whose life he was even taking, and the world had nodded and moved on.

"If it concerns you, I do not think any less of you for what you did," Hannibal assured him.

It had not concerned Will. He had always known that Hannibal's high opinion of Will would stand up against Will's killing. They had known each other so little before Will first became a killer. Will thought that even if this hadn't happened in Hannibal's home, he probably would have told Hannibal.

There was no one else he would be able to tell.

"I consider you and Abigail my family, Will," Hannibal told him, and Will moved his hand towards Hannibal's. It was objectively terrifying, because Will had felt so separate from any idea of family for so long, but Hannibal said it so easily, as if it wasn't even an admission. It was easy to accept what Hannibal said when he stated it like that. Hannibal opened his mouth to say something else, then the sound of footsteps was suddenly outside the door, and the doctor was opening the door and greeting them once again.

It was time for Will's MRI.

The encephalitis diagnosis came back quickly. His brain was on fire. It sure as hell felt like it. He had almost cried when Doctor Lucas told him. He hadn't realised how much fear he had been filled with. Fear of test after test, scan after scan, always coming back empty or raising more questions that they would never quite answer. It was a story he had seen happen all too often.

His dad had been chronically ill. That was exactly what it was: chronic illness. They gave it another name - FND, or functional neurological disorder - but really, it was a kinder way of saying the doctors had no clue. Every test came back normal. There was nothing wrong with his brain, yet there were days when he couldn't walk and his muscles all seemed to cramp and burn. The next day, he might be able to go for a three mile run with no problem. For whatever reason, his brain had days when it refused to do things it was physically capable of doing, and Will's father would be left bed-ridden.

Will had moved out as soon as he could. His stepmother would have to be his father's sole caregiver now. They hadn't tried to stop him leaving; they had wanted Will gone, even if it meant losing a caregiver. It wasn't that they didn't love Will. There was a complicated, distanced, broken love. Will had accepted that some families were bound by nothing more than blood. They were random souls tied together by the bond of family, and they were a terrible match. They cared deeply about each other but couldn't find the common ground to be able to communicate easily. They silently observed the other breaking apart.

They worked best when they had some distance between them. It gave them more to talk about when they saw each other, and it liberated them from the patient-carer dynamic. His dad had never said much about how Will had cared for him. He tended to thank Will when Will brought him something or helped him in or out of a chair. His dad had asked for help when he needed it, usually in some variation on a muttered swear word then a call of, "Will, would you come help me a minute?" and some grumbling about how his fingers were *doing it again* so he needed Will to button his shirt up. There was no cure for FND. Only different ways of managing it.

Will was sure that at least part of why his dad had been so eager for Will to leave was because he felt humiliated and infuriated by his body. He had grown more accepting of his illness, but there were always times when it got to him, and he didn't like Will seeing him vulnerable. He would rather Will didn't see him at all.

His dad had died suddenly when Will was in his mid-twenties. It was a shock, but Will had known that it would happen like this eventually. Whatever illness his dad dealt with, it left him more vulnerable to everything else. He virtually always had a cold. Infections hit him hard. Maybe his brain knew how to fight off illness and some days, it just refused to do it, like how it would refuse to walk or move his fingers. Maybe there was something else causing it, but after they finally settled on the term 'FND', they didn't seem interested in trying to find any new names.

Despite how self-aware Will usually was about his issues, he had somehow never drawn the connection before. Of course he was terrified of getting treatment for his recent issues. What if it just became years of tests and questions, before finally being shrugged away because it was an issue too big to solve?

Another fucking win for daddy issues. Perfect.

They began treatment for the encephalitis right away. He should get better quickly, they hoped.

Over his recovery, Hannibal kept his distance. He didn't disappear. He still visited Will, but he made sure there was always someone else there. He brought Abigail to Will's house because she wanted to see him. They ate lunch together and chatted like they had done many times before.

Hannibal spoke to Will like nothing was wrong, but they never had enough time alone for Will to have a conversation with him. Will had kissed him. He had gone through a fucking sexual awakening and the cause of it hadn't brought it up once.

Since they had met, their relationship had consisted of Hannibal inserting himself into Will's life and Will accepting this with varying levels of enthusiasm. It was frustrating. For a decent stretch of time, Will could have cared less if Hannibal was in his life. Now that Will had finally invited Hannibal in, he felt stood up.

When Will had first realised his feelings about Hannibal, it had been a fog. He knew that this was something other than simple platonic love, that it had veered into the romantic, but he couldn't make out the details. His brain had been so ruined, he couldn't process it.

During his recovery, Will had been given more time to think clearly about the recent weeks.

He felt better. He did not feel like the man he was before he had encephalitis. He felt reborn. Crystal clear.

He felt like he was standing in the middle of a forest and it was silent. No birds or cicadas or leaves rustling. He could see and hear everything. He was a predator lying in wait on prey, perfectly attuned to its environment.

On some level, he had already known his feelings for Hannibal. When he had told Hannibal about his kiss with Alana, it hadn't just been that Will had expected this to hurt Hannibal. He had wanted it to. He wanted to see the pain and sadness and anger and jealousy swirl up inside Hannibal at the thought of Will accepting anyone but Hannibal.

He didn’t know how he felt about his new self, but he could see the truth of it. He could see who he was and who he had been and who he would one day become.

He had killed Abel Gideon because he had seen Garret Jacob Hobbs. It had been an automatic, almost unthinking reaction: he had killed Hobbs once before, and he had slid into the grooves left by past events and he had done the only thing he knew to do, when faced with the killer.

He had done it, too, because he knew that Hannibal would support him. In the moment he had strangled Gideon, he had been unable to process any other consequence. As long as

Hannibal would stand by him, that was all that mattered. He had thought of Hannibal as he had taken life away. Of course, he had hallucinated Hannibal watching him, but it was more than that, too. He had seen Hannibal dying at Will's hands. He had seen Hannibal's hands wrapped around Hobbs's neck, as if Will was sharing Hannibal's body. Will had seen himself on the ground, gasping silently for air that would never again fill his lungs.

There was plenty left for Will to think about. He still hadn't processed his feelings about this realisation, and he had no idea what the reality of a relationship with a man would be - but he could admit to himself that he wanted to try it. That even if he didn't want to have a relationship with Hannibal, Hannibal would be able to persuade him. Will would do what he had to, if it kept Hannibal in his life.

"You're looking better," Beverly told him.

They were in the workshop together again. She had come to work on her bike, which happened to be a convenient excuse to check in on Will.

Will made a vague sound of agreement. "I don't feel like I'm fighting my own brain anymore. That's an improvement."

"Yeah, it is." Beverly lowered her tool to consider him. She looked hesitant, conflicted.

Will closed his eyes. "I kissed Hannibal." Eyes open.

Beverly's face went blank, then shocked, then gleeful. Whatever she had been thinking about was forgotten. "What the fuck, Will?" She said it like she was congratulating him. "I mean, I did think… but still. What the fuck?"

He shrugged and busied himself clearing up a messy workspace. "Just before I got diagnosed with encephalitis. I kissed him, he said he was worried about my mental state. And here we are."

She set her tool down on the floor and leaned towards him. "Wait, and what?"

Will looked to her for clarification.

"Like, I guess first off, how do you feel about it now that your brain isn't a bag of mush?" The excitement of the initial announcement had worn off, and now she had a curious, though serious, look on her face.

He let himself pause. "I feel clear."

She nodded. Maybe she had felt the same, when she had first realised. Maybe she was used to Will being vague. “And Hannibal? Has he said anything? Have you?”

“I haven’t really had a chance. First, I was dealing with the encephalitis, and I haven’t been alone with him since I started treatment.” Beverly nodded sympathetically. Will wasn’t looking at her. “He’s avoiding me. He always makes sure someone else is around. He comes to visit, but he brings Abigail.”

She raised her eyebrows. “Wow. I can’t believe he’s ghosting you. What a little bitch.”

Will shot a look at her. “He’s ghosting me?”

“Yeah, man,” she agreed emphatically. Her nod of reinforcement was interrupted as she suddenly glanced up to him. His confusion must be obvious. She laughed. “Oh, come on, old man. Ghosting? Everyone knows about ghosting.”

“Hey, I’m not on Facebook or Twitter or anything, why the fuck would I have heard that before?”

She laughed, but it didn’t feel mocking. “It’s when you’re texting someone and they suddenly start ignoring you with no warning or anything.”

Will took a second to think about this. Will would never describe his situation with Hannibal in those terms, but, yeah, that was essentially what had happened. He grumbled.

“But that doesn’t mean he’s rejecting you. He clearly cares about you, maybe he’s just giving you space to physically recover and process your emotions before getting you to commit to something, y’know? I don’t know much about Hannibal, but… you’ve only ever dated women, right?”

Will gave her a dry smile. “I don’t really date anyone. But, yeah, I thought I was straight.” It felt weird to say that. Since he had kissed Hannibal, he had avoided thinking too hard about his sexuality. He had tried to imagine it. Having sex with a man - Hannibal or anyone else. The thought made his stomach swim with discomfort and anxiety and excitement and arousal.

He probably wasn’t straight. He could say that much. Gay was wrong, though. Bisexual didn’t feel like him. He was aware that he could scour the internet for the right term, but he didn’t know this part of himself well enough to be able to pin it down. What mattered to him, really, was being close to Hannibal. Finding a nice, neat label to make it easier to explain himself to others was entirely uninteresting to Will.

“So Hannibal’s the one who made you realise?”

“Yeah, I kind of realised and…”

“Immediately started making out with him?” Beverly offered.

He narrowed his eyes. He wasn’t quite sure how he had planned to finish that sentence, but that definitely wasn’t it.

“So what you’re saying is you had a sexuality crisis and kissed Hannibal while your brain was on fire…” She cocked her head to the side as she recalculated. “Yeah, I don’t know, man, maybe Hannibal’s not being a little bitch. I think giving you space is the right thing to do here. Although he could communicate a bit better about that.”

Will gave no verbal response. He couldn’t entirely understand Hannibal’s motives, but Will doubted that Beverly’s assessment of the situation was accurate.

The lake was frozen over and snow covered the grassy bank. Will and Abigail sat a couple of feet apart on their own camping chair. Abigail had layered on two scarves and zipped them up under her heavy winter coat. She wore gloves, except for when she needed to do more delicate work like tying lines.

Will hadn’t been sure how keen Abigail would be on fishing over the winter. He had expected her interest to die down while it was frosty outside, then she might bring it up to Will again when spring arrived. Since Will had killed Gideon, they had gone fishing more frequently than ever before. Hannibal didn’t join them. He had come along once during fall, and he seemed content enough to watch Abigail and Will enjoy their craft and he had happily joined in with their conversations. It did nothing for him, though.

Will enjoyed his time alone with Abigail. There was a comfort to spending time with the three of them together, but with the uncertainty in his current relationship with Hannibal, there was a silent tension in it. It was centred between Hannibal and Will, but Abigail was aware of it. Even these imperceptible shifts caught her eye. She hadn’t brought it up.

A few minutes of silence passed in between conversations. When they sat out there for hours, there was no way to fill all the time, and the silence settled comfortably around them. Abigail was usually the one who spoke first. She was someone always thirsty for knowledge. She soaked in words and documentaries and the world around her and she carefully decoded and cached away the information she found.

“Do you feel like you’re you again?” she asked. It was an allusion to a call they’d had soon after Gideon’s death. Will had given an account of what had happened and why he was going to get his brain scanned.

“Yeah, I think so.” It was hard to say. He hadn’t been fully himself in a while and he had changed since then. He had to get used to these new parts of himself. It felt like getting used to driving on the other side of the road. “I feel more in control of my actions.”

Abigail was staring at the fishing hole. She made no sign of having heard Will, but she was listening.

“Do you feel as if you’re in control of your actions?”

Her brow furrowed. She looked like she was trying to remember something. “I don’t think I struggle with feeling in control. I do whatever I want to do. I’m just not sure if I’m doing the right thing.”

Will regarded her. “It’s not always easy to know.”

She broke herself out of her thoughts to look at Will. “But maybe it doesn’t even matter. Maybe we’re just animals and we’re not ‘supposed’ to do anything other than what our instincts tell us. Or, I mean, don’t some people say that there are infinite realities and every single possible reality is playing out at the same time? If that’s true, then we’re all just doing what we’re supposed to do, so who gives a shit?” She shrugged. She did not sound distressed or desperate. Her face was blank.

He assessed her. “Is that how you felt when you killed Nick Boyle?”

She looked up at him abruptly. There was a flash of panic, but it faded quickly to a carefully cold facade. “No.” She swallowed and glanced down at where her hands were folded on her lap. “It felt… good, at first. It felt just. But Nick didn’t kill Marissa, did he?”

They both knew the answer to that question. “No,” he agreed quietly.

“What about you?” She kept her chin up and refused to break eye contact. “You felt good when you killed my dad.”

Will swallowed a thick lump in his throat. Abigail could drill straight through to the centre of people, just like Will and Hannibal could. She would sense it if he lied. She would want to hear the truth. She knew the truth already, even before Will had voiced it in front of her and Hannibal. “Yes. I did.”

See? See?

She gave a short nod and bit her lip. “Does it make us bad people?”

Will didn’t know the answer to that. “Hannibal doesn’t think so.”

“I know. You’ve killed two people in front of him and he doesn’t think any less of you.” She smiled, but it didn’t look happy. In her eyes, Will could see that she was somewhere else. “Do you ever think it’s strange?”

“What’s strange?”

“How we met each other,” she clarified. She was observing him carefully, keeping all of her own emotions hidden away. “I mean, you killed my dad. You and Hannibal saved my life. If you had arrived just a few minutes later, I would have died.”

“We had good timing. We were lucky.”

“Yeah, crazy lucky.” She let those words stew in the cold air. “It’s like a higher power intended for this all to happen.”

The breeze had gotten more icy since they had first set up their rods. Even with all of his layers of clothing, the cold seeped through every seam, every microscopic hole in the tightly woven fabric. “I didn’t take you for the type of person to believe in God.”

Her smile became almost sardonic. “I don’t,” she confirmed, “but I believe that there are people who have more power than me.”

She was no longer looking at him. Her face invited no further questions. They sat and waited for a fish to bite.

Chapter End Notes

i fell off my bike a couple days ago + fucked up my dominant arm so ! updates might be slower until i can type properly again <3 also the plan for this fic is ~12 chapters and an epilogue. subject to change + later chapters r probs gonna be a bit bulkier but we r nearing end game now babey.

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!